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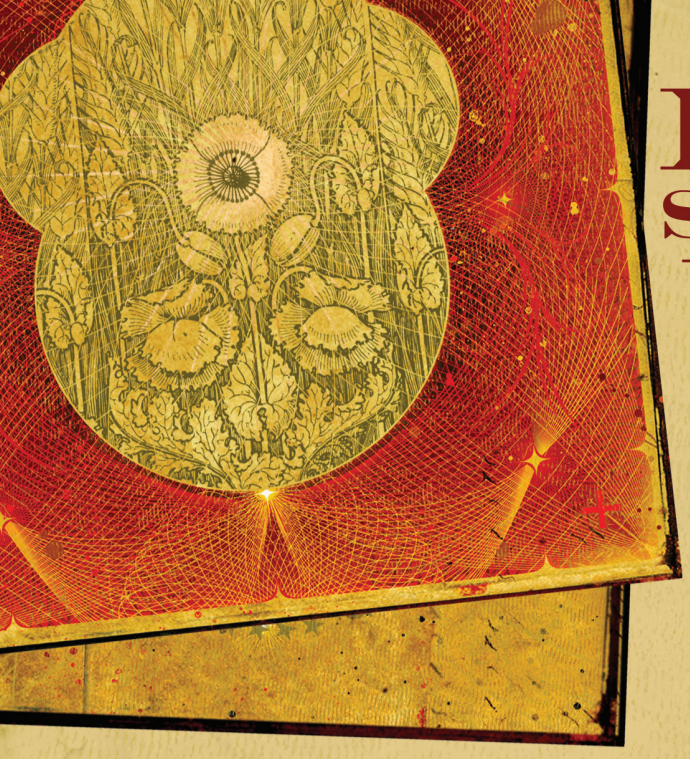

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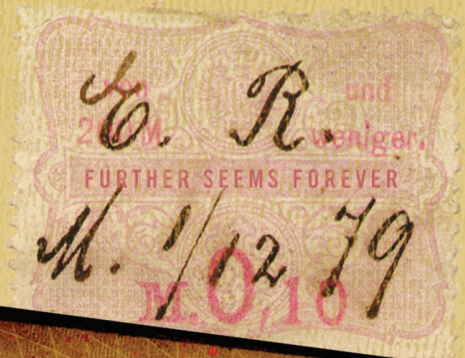

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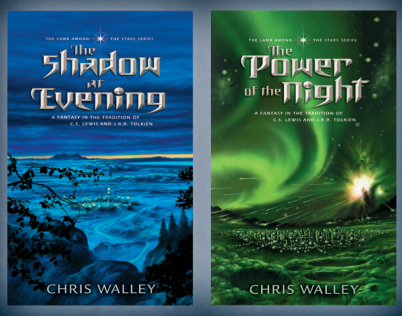
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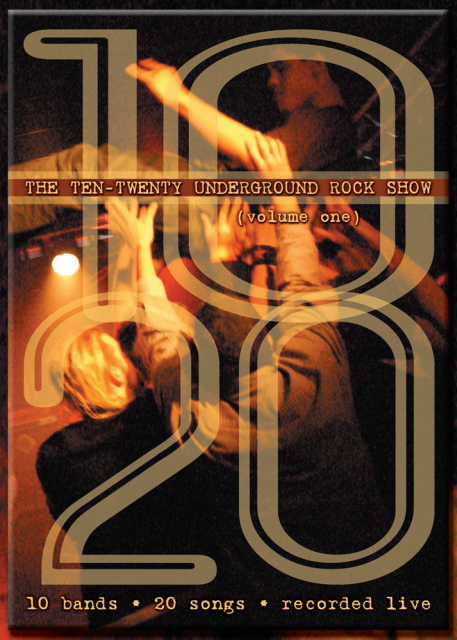

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OFF CENTER STUDIOS

From the editor

Doug Van Pelt

"NO MATTER HOW YOU CAME TO FAITH, WE ARE ALL CALLED TO LIVE A HOLY LIFE." (KEVIN CLAY)

I once overheard someone relay what another person described me as: "a man of grace." I about wanted to cry when I heard that. If that can be said of me, then I am a happy and fulfilled man. I hope that can continue. Grace motivates me to love and to be pure. I like what artist Kevin Clay said during his Sonshine Festival performance earlier this summer: "No matter your perspective or how you came to faith, we are called to live a holy life." I believe that. Many will argue and split hairs over what a "holy life" is, but a biblical definition would say, "set apart for God," would it not? Some believers will forsake pleasure (be it chocolate or cigarettes or drink) and others will forsake certain types of entertainment or language. I believe one person's standards can be most holy and precious, and yet be very different (more liberal or conservative) than another's. For this reason we make an effort to point out something as insignificant as the amount of cusswords in a movie (see our "Play" section). Taming the tongue is always an important lesson for us, but for some folks (especially in other cultures) micro-managing what words are "proper" or not is just not what God is working with them on. This can be confusing for some other believers, kind of like the eating meat sacrificed to idols was in the church in Corinth. Anyway, all that to say that some people might want to know that the Chris Staples album reviewed in this issue drops the S-bomb. The new Jerry Gaskill album that I'm reviewing for hmmag.com, which also has profanity (like the f-bomb in every chorus of "Face the Day"), and the sound-effect of a bonghit (sure, it could be tobacco), and a nude woman crouched on the cover, all of which is enough to keep many from partaking in his artistic creation/solo album. Such is the difference in a life with a direction of piety/purity/holiness. We endeavor to give you, the reader, information with which you can make your own educated choice and decision. If you're interested in more thoughts and discussions like this one, please check out my blog at hmmag.com. It's sometimes updated daily. God bless you.

REGULAR

Letters 10
Hard news 12
Live report 18
Heaven's Metal 20

FEATURETTE

He Is Legend 22
Mourning September 24
12 Stones 26
Society's Finest 28
Hawk Nelson 30

FEATURE

Me Without You 32
Zao poster 36
Latin Rock 38
Further Seems Forever 40
Unearth says 45

INTERMISSION

Americans of Faith 48
Columns 60

REVIEW

Music 51
DVD, book, & gear 58
Indie pick 62

Letters to the Edit

FACE PAINTING BY NUMBERS

I am writing to speak up for Antestor. First, who cares if Hellhammer is working with them! Good for him! By the way, Kovenant rocks! Who cares what studio they use as long as the production is good. Most of all, who cares if they use corpse paint! I am in a non-christian Black Metal band and I wear corpse paint! I have worn it to concerts, the mall, and even school! So nobody should complain if they wear it at a show! Lazarus was dead! It's all about the music and what they represent! It's the same thing with all Christian music! People are such hypocrites and it makes me sick to hear Christians complaining about what a GREAT band looks like and wears on stage! Keep with Hellhammer and the corpse paint, Antestor! Don't let any one keep you down!
–The Darklord, James Benson [Metalhd21@aol.com]

[Ed – You wear corpse paint at school and the mall? That's very, uh, interesting. I agree with your sentiments about Antestor and I'd be glad to hang out with you at school or the mall; but if we became close friends, sooner or later I'd be "honest" with you about your fashion statements…]

ON DEMON HUNTER

I loved the article on Demon Hunter! I had the wonderful opportunity to catch them in Michigan, and I'd like to say that the band does uphold a strong image and backs it up, too. The show was full of energy and raw musicianship. They played the best of their two albums. It was touching to hear a large crowd sing along with Ryan's emotion-filled lyrics. If anyone has the chance to see them, do it. And for anyone who was wondering about the dogs on the cover...they're not Ryan's, but a friend of the family. (I had to ask while I had the chance).
–Brenda Bennett [b1dancer1@hotmail.com]

I am pleased to report that I was able to see Haste The Day at the beginning of the Demon Hunter: *Summer of Darkness* tour. Their live show ruled, as does their *Burning Bridges* CD. (Even though it has been out for a couple months, I would suggest that you make haste and get the record now!) After the show, I got to meet the woman who is on the cover of the album! She is not as sorrowful/wrathful in person, but is very cool. Come to find out, she is married to the singer from

Demon Hunter, who actually designed the whole album art layout for HTD. Also, the new DH song "My Heartstrings Come Undone" was written for the beautiful lady.
–Max Oxman [Grants Pass, OR]

[Ed – Settle down there, Max!]

SMILE, YOU'RE ON CAMERA

Why are you promoting bands like "Demon Hunter" and CD's like *The Funeral of God* by ZAO? I have never seen a more mean-looking band than "Demon Hunter." Did everyone fail to notice how cruel and secular those guys look on the current HM magazine? I can't even condone the name. Believers are not supposed to "hunt" demons! That's looking for trouble. *The Funeral of God*, Zao's latest, sounds very anti-God to me. God is a spirit, and spirits cannot die. I thought they were a Christian band. Maybe they were, but if they aren't now, no Christian magazine should be promoting this kind of "music." If these bands are supposed to be an example of the Christian-life, and what we stand for, I'd rather be at home with Jesus! Prov. 14:14; Jeremiah 15:6-7; 2 Thess. 1:7-8; 1 Samuel 2:30 (NIV)
–Mark Jones [punkman@fcg.net]

[Ed – Sigh. I'm sure you mean well, but please try looking beyond the surface. Your letter implies a doctrine stating that believers must always be smiling (at least for photographs), and that is bad theology. As for the concept behind the new Zao record, information on this theme can be found at their label's website: "What if God decided humanity has rejected Him so completely that He just... disappeared? What would become of mankind if God chose to "die," to "go to sleep forever?" That's the idea explored with gut-wrenching detail on the mind-bendingly cinematic and horrifically apocalyptic concept album from Zao, The Funeral of God."]

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SCRIPTURE "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him." (John 13:16)

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Pflugerville, Texas 78660-7543

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SUBSCRIPTIONS U.S.A. – $15, Canada/Mexico – $20 / Overseas – $25

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SEND TO Letters 2 Ed, POB 141007 Austin, TX 78714
Letters@HMmag.com

HM Magazine is dependently owned and operated (Psalm 62)

Printed in the U.S.

HM Magazine (ISSN 1066-6923) is published bi-monthly for $15 per year by HM, 6307 Cele Road #573, Pflugerville, TX 78660. Periodicals Postage Paid at Pflugerville, Texas and at additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
HM, PO Box 141007, Austin TX 78714-1007
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HARDNEWS
Quick & concise

Dear Ephesus

BY DOUG VAN PELT

When emo seemed like a new concept – back in the previous millenium – there were a handful of bands that seemed to get it right the first time (Brandtson, Appleseed Cast, and Dear Ephesus). It was with great shock and sadness when they called it a day back in 1999. Since then many a rising new band has cited DE as a definite influence. While this has not gone unnoticed by the former members, there was never a serious thought towards reforming the band. Vocalist Aaron Widerspahn has been "involved in several promising film and music projects." Guitarist Brett Levsen went on to the band Tenderfoot and then electrical engineering work. Bassist Lu Defabrizio is in the band The Kick. Guitarist Ed Lamoso has been playing with his band, The Sweetkisses. Drummer Jeff Irizarry has played drums for several artists. They all still live in the same town, and this past year the idea of getting back together to record a few songs finally made sense to everyone. Thanks to the prodding and help of Jeff Adams, who works for the infamous Jeff Hanson Management team (Creed, Alter Bridge), Dear Ephesus will record an EP this fall for his Silent Majority Recordings label. "We will sound like an older, wiser, better Dear Ephesus," promises Lamoso.

And sometimes good news just seems to rain from the sky. Thus, it is with great rejoicing that we pass on this exciting announcement. Who knows? Maybe we can see a performance or two out of these prolific songwriters! "The reunion is still in the works," hints Lamoso.

THE 10-20 UNDERGROUND ROCK SHOW

Spindust Records, home of Ray Boltz (and GS Megaphone) music has filmed and released 10 indie bands (2 songs each) at the Gathering Grounds coffee house in Ohio. Metal bands like Aletheian and Gnashing of Teeth are captured in beautiful 16:9 widescreen format. Rock band My Existence (winners of the Visible School's 2002 New Band Tournament) is one of the highlights here, but the best thing is knowing the underground scene is being represented and given good exposure. At press time the Gathering Grounds venue has closed its doors, so the future of this useful project is uncertain. [undergroundrockshow.com]

News bullets

South Africa's alt, gothic rock band **The Awakening** is about to tour for the first time on U.S. soil. On October 8, the *Darker than Silence* Tour will kick off in Naples, FL and will end up in Fort Myers, FL on the 24th.

Jesse Smith, ex-drummer for Zao, has been busy writing and working on pre-production for his new band **Gods**' full-length album. He has stepped out from behind the drums to take over on vocals and guitar and becoming chief songwriter. The as-yet-untitled album was recorded at the famed Barry Poynter's Studio in Little Rock, AR (The Juliana Theory, Zao, Living Sacrifice, Embodyment, etc.) in August. Gods will be embarking on tour in September with Society's Finest through October. Check out tour dates at www.scotomapromotions.com.

In related news, **Society's Finest** and their new line-up (including singer Joshua Ashworth, Eli Bowser on guitar, Daniel Barton on bass, and new recruits Kevin Roddy, formerly of This Runs Through, and drummer Luke Laskaris, formerly of Love Lies Bleeding) are on tour now and will be through October. Check societysfinest.com for tour dates and locations.

Blindside will be on tour throughout September with **mewithoutYou**, **The Kick** and selected dates with **Namur**. Also, make sure to pick up mewithoutYou's new CD, released September 21. See their cover story in this issue.

Boot to Head Records is reforming after a few years on hiatus. Look for new releases by **The Clergy** in early October and **The Stivs** in early 2005. The newly functioning label is also accepting demos to fill in the new roster, but is only looking for styles of punk or related that could exist in the 70's and 80's.

xLookingForwardx

BY DAVID STAGG

What This Means To Me is a sporadic, epileptic fit of 14 songs that make you feel like you've been in a wrestling ring with a pro for two minutes, 14 times over. The lyrics come and go just as fast, like a speeding car on the highway that rips by, exploding in bursts before subsiding at stoplights.

This, my friends, is hardcore.

"This record was written to be this record," Justin Chaillou, singer of Maryland's xLooking Forwardx, says of their aforementioned sophomore release. "The first CD was kind of like two year's worth of material put together, so some of the songs were songs we had written when we were really starting off as a band. We feel like it's a little more cohesive, that this is a smarter project."

Smarter, yes. Harder? A more emphatic yes. And the kids seem to agree.

"Here in Maryland, most of the time, it's just out of control," Chaillou explains. "A lot of kids come and stage-dive and the pile-ons and everything else. Very rarely do you ever see a fight or anything like that. That's the best. We're playing in front of the same kids we've played in front of 100 times. Everybody still gets into it."

If the crowd that sticks it out with them at their live show isn't family, the members of the Seven Seconds, Minor Threat inspired xLooking Forwardx will always have each other. Josh and Justin are brothers. Kevin, the bass player, is their cousin. And Kevin O'Brien, their drummer, has been their best friend for a while.

"We don't really fight or anything like that," Chaillou says. "I think that's kind of what makes the group what it is, is that we all get along well."

This, matched with a collective belief in adhering to straight-edge, give xLooking Forwardx a cohesiveness most bands can't attain.

"I think that what it is," Chaillou says, explaining what straight-edge means to him, "is a commitment against living self-destructively, especially as a means of social acceptance, and I think that's what it was for us. It was kind of like rebellion, you know? I think it's a shame that in our culture nowadays, the rebellious thing to do is to not drink, to not smoke."

Not only does this separate them from the majority of the hardcore scene, but their sound—a throwback to the original, Bad Brains style of hardcore—remains the same, through and through.

"I think a lot of hardcore really comes from what's going through somebody's head when they're writing it, what's in their heart," Chaillou says. "If people want to involve a lot of other influences… as for us, we love just straight-forward hardcore. Tried and true, raw, stripped down."

Christian rock fans witnessed the final show of metal giants **Oil** this past August at the Lighthouse in Long Beach, CA, where the band began what would become "Dead to the World Fest," an annual metal extravaganza. They had previously been nominated for a Dove award and have released three successful albums. **East West** also made a performance at the show.

Blood & Ink Records recently signed Canada's **Blessed by a Broken Heart** and the band will be recording over the next month and their debut release is scheduled for late September.

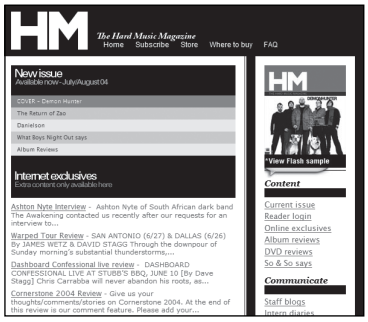
Denison Marrs is busy in the studio finishing up their second Floodgate release. The guys entered the studio just after Eric Collins' baby was born. Look for an October self-titled release.

Ardent Records' rock band **Jonah33** was named an official spokes-band for Redeem the Vote, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that encourages Christians to register to vote. Similar to MTV's Rock the Vote campaign that launched in 1990, Redeem the Vote has planned an aggressive national campaign designed to increase voter registration and turnout among the nation's youth. As part of its involvement as spokes-band, Jonah33 was selected to write and record the campaign's theme song, "Silence Never Speaks."

This past summer, record label Crowne Music Group has been renamed Shelter Records. The name change comes after several changes in the company including an address change from Franklin, TN to Nashville, TN as well some staff changes.

Kekal has recorded a few songs for their up-coming release, hopefully to be released in early 2005 and are called "Envy and its Manifesto,"

HARDNEWS
Page fourteen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Local clubs

THE LOFT

Ventura, CA - THELOFTVENTURA.COM

Mikee Bridges (of Tomfest, Tragedy Ann fame) runs this venue that sits atop the amazing Skate Street Skate Park (featured in *Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2*). An all ages music venue with an occupancy of about 150. "We do mostly punk and hardcore shows, but manage to get a few other genres, too." A no-alcohol bar, full sound and lights, and even showers for the bands. 4-5 shows a week with 4-6 bands a night, mixed between Christian and secular, providing what Bridges calls "a breeding ground of conversation. We show our faith, not preach it. A lot of kids congregate here and we are there just to be with them."

CAVE 9

Birmingham, AL - CAVE9.COM

With a growing music scene, no other place in Birmingham was providing all ages shows within distance. Two guys worked out a deal with a local building and setup Cave 9. It's two stories, dirty and absolutely perfect for enjoying a good show. While some shows reach capacity, others pull enough depending on the genre of music. Cave 9 books some great bands and does so without seeking a profit. The entire outfit is run by volunteers and cash to pay the bands is pulled from the admission at the door. It's a true labor of love, music for the kids by the kids.

News bullets

"Strength in My Weakness," "A Dream for A Moment," and "Characteristicon."

Floodgate Records recently signed **Forever Changed** after completing a self-booked 36 city tour where they opened for acts such as **Anathello**, **Cool Hand Luke** and the **Violet Burning**. The band plans to enter the studio in October for a spring 2005 release.

Pluto Records also recently signed metal band **Acedia**, from Virginia. Their first release for Pluto will be an EP entitled *So Esoteric*, which will be recorded in September for a late fall release. In the meantime, the band will be on the road for much of the summer, so check their web site (www.acedia.us) for more information.

Metal band **The Showdown** is in the studio recording their first Mono vs. Stereo label release, *A Chorus of Obliteration*. Bruce Fitzhugh (Zao, Living Sacrifice) is at the helm.

The debut full length from D.C.-area **The Out_Circuit**, *Burn Your Scripts Boys*, is available at www.lujorecords.com, but won't be available in stores until late September. Check the web site for mp3s.

Solid State Records has picked up two new bands: **He Is Legend** (from North Carolina) and **The Chariot** (from Atlanta, GA). Both have records planned for release this fall. Both are also on tour; check the dates at heislegend.com and thechariot.com

Duvall has been in the studio recording a Christmas album. The Christmas project will release in November on Asian Man Records. The tentative title is *O Holy Night*. Plans for a Christmas tour are also in the works. Songs include "Angels We Have Heard on High," "Joy to the World" and "Away in a Manger."

Morrow Metal

What's going on in the world of metal...

Royal Anguish has finished a new EP titled *Tales of Sullen Eyes* produced by Erik Rutan (Hate Eternal, ex-Morbid Angel). They have also released their previously unreleased 1995 album *The Chronicles of Autumn Sorrow* on Bombworks Records.

Sympathy has recorded some new songs for a possible EP on Fear Dark Records. The EP will include a cover of a Suffocation tune.

Fear Dark has signed Eluveitie from Helvetia. Eluveitie plays Celtic pagan metal in the vein of Skyforger, Cruachan and Thyrfing. In August a re-release of their debut-EP *Vên* will be available through Fear Dark.
eluveitie.ch

The new Morphia album *Fading Beauty* will be released in August 2004. The band will do a CD presentation during the Flevo Festival in Holland.

Rob Caldwell of Faithbomb has started a new record label called Bombworks Records. The label has already released albums by Consecrator, Royal Anguish, and Armageddon Holocaust, among others. All of their releases are available at blastbeats.com.

Paramaecium has finished recording their new album *Echoes from the Ground* and it is set for a July 2004 release.

Mortification has been playing lots of live shows lately in support of their new album, *Brain Cleaner*. On Good Friday, they had a chance to play the Australian Gospel Music Festival to over 600 fans. The set included songs from all twelve studio albums.

Here's some indie albums you metalheads might want to check out...

Bestiary – *The Murder Wheel*: Awesome Michigan band that combines melodic death and metalcore. Very impressive release that should appeal to both metalheads and fans of the heavier Solid State bands.

Renascent – *Demons' Quest*: Killer eighteen minute EP from Finnish band playing a mix of black, death, and thrash with plenty of melodic and technical flair. For fans of Crimson Moonlight, Dissection, Emperor, and Old Man's Child. Highly recommended!
renascent.net/

Random Eyes – *Eyes Ablaze*: Melodic metal/hard rock seven piece from Finland with female/male duo lead singers. Band has excellent potential and should appeal to other female fronted bands like Lacuna Coil, The Gathering, and Nightwish.
randomeyes.net/

AWAS – *Time to Choose*: Sixteen minute EP of average, but brutal death metal from Germany, with a sound similar to Corpse and Acoustic Torment.
awas-music.de/

Exaudi – *Ein Stein*: Three-song EP from German gothic death/doom metal band. They have a very solid sound similar in style to old Morphia, Ashen Mortality, and Visionaire.
exaudi-metal.de/

Underground Rot Compilation: Initial release of Rotting Records. Seventeen extreme metal songs from bands like Sorrowstorm, Metanoia, Encryptor, Divine Heretic, Demoniciduth, and others. Some decent stuff, and some not-so-decent stuff.
rottingrecords.tk/

Global Warning – *Digital Black*: Nu-metal/classic metal band from Washington. James Hetfield-style vocals with heavy, but sometimes monotonous sound. For fans of Metallica, Eternal Decision, or Faithbomb.
globalwarning.net/

Deborah – *The Song of Deborah*: Mexican, all-female black/death metal band. Decent band, but could use some work. Six songs that include three covers (Immortal Souls, Deuteronomium, and Exousia).

A lot has been going on post-**Creed**: **Mark Tremonti** has joined with Creed drummer **Scott Phillips** and original Creed bassist to form Alter Bridge, and released their debut album on Wind-up Records in August. Look for a tour this September. **Scott Stapp** has also been busy in the studio writing and recording. His first post-Creed recording was on an album from August 31 offering compositions inspired by the film *The Passion of the Christ*.

After entering the Christian overall sales chart at #3 and Billboard's Top 200 at #74, **Pillar**'s *Where Do We Go From Here?* sold over 44,000 in its first four weeks released. Their song "Bring Me Down" has already hit #1 on Christian rock radio and the video for the single premiered on MTV's Headbanger's Ball at the beginning of August, just after being added to FUSE TV.

Stretch Arm Strong has been all over the States this summer. After ending up some dates with Only Crime, Bane, Martyr AD, **Jesus Wept**, Japanese hardcore band FC5 and Thursday, the band jumped on tour with Rise Against.

It looks like **Comeback Kid** is set to record in October at The Outpost with Jim Siegel (Give Up the Ghost, Blacklisted). The new full length should be ready for a February release.

South African hardcore band **Neshamah** have released a new album entitled *Communicating in Heart Beats*. Look for some recorded videos to be on the CD.

Sales of **P.O.D.'s** self-titled album has sold over 1 million copies worldwide. Atlantic will be presenting the guys with a platinum award along with a "*Matrix-Reloaded*" plaque driven by their lead single and video, "Sleeping Awake."

HARDNEWS
Page sixteen

Spoken word

This year at Cornerstone Festival the arrival and use of the spoken word poet really stuck out. From the mainstage to the evening encores, many acts had a poet warm the crowd up before the music began. Poets like Bradley Hathaway had the crowds roaring with approval during his pieces. And it wasn't just one guy that's breaking out right now – here's four to keep an eye on:

1 **Billy Lamont's** experience with music goes way back – to the formation of Circle of Dust. Lamont began experimenting and writing with Clay Scott after his metal band Immortal disbanded. Lamont then focused on his first book (*The Gallery of Light*). He's since toured with Lollapalooza many times, combining poetry with activism. His "Protest: A Declaration" repents for the sin of our forefathers as well as stating: "…we feel the pain and persecution of our women, the gays and the lesbian; and will not suffer the abuse of our children." His CD & booklet, *Billy Lamont with the Peculiar People* is a benefit for Larry Norman's healthcare trust fund; and his new CD, *Into The 21st Century* was recorded with the musical accompaniment of The Alarm. [billylamont.com]

2 **Rob Lacey** is a British actor that was told he was dying of cancer, which prompted him to write a paraphrase of the book of Job. His health miraculously improved, and that project has turned into *The Word on the Street*, a witty paraphrase of the Scriptures – "the Bible as performance art" – bringing the concepts and stories of the Word to a street level. His British accent adds to the performance for American ears. This project (on book and audio CD) has the muscle of Zondervan behind it, which will expose this genre to mainstream evangelicals in the USA. [roblacey.com]

3 **Ben Devries** is another poet that's been snatched up by Zondervan, who've published *A Delicate Fade* (which some may notice is a tribute to Common Children's second album). Rather than a collection of short poems, this project is an "intense stream-of-consciousness narrative" that shows a twenty-something writer wrestling with life issues, postmodernism, and faith. [adelicatefade.com]

4 **Bradley Hathaway** tells stories about being emo, hardcore dancing, wearing tight pants but being a manly man, and once touching a girl's breast accidentally – all the while espousing Christian virtues like saving himself for holy matrimony. This is edgy stuff, but it's really no rougher than a high school Christian kid talking with his everyday vocabulary. He gets into our comfort zone with these cultural commonalities and zings home his points with conviction and humor. Quite brilliant. His performances at Cornerstone are just a glimpse of what he's got planned for the future. At press time he'll be out on the road with Blindside, mewithoutYou, and The Kick. Catch him now, because this kid's going to blow up. We can feel it. [thebradley.net]

Internet audio

When mp3.com changed formats from free audio file hosting to paid server, the internet music world was drastically altered. Sites popped up all over the place offering free hosting, but only a few have survived. Below are a few of the best places to get your free music fix.

PURE VOLUME
Purevolume.com
AUDIO: Streaming & download
CONTENT: Pleny of content. Featuring indie rock, punk, hardcore, emo, hip hop and everything else
PROS: Great design and supported by many labels
CONS: Flash audio player is awkward

CNET DOWNLOAD
Music.download.com
AUDIO: Streaming & download
CONTENT: Primarily mainstream but more indie are signing up
PROS: Tons of bands and fast servers
CONS: Smaller bands easily get lost in the muddle

HXCMP3
Hxcmp3.com
AUDIO: Streaming & download
CONTENT: Hardcore divided by subcategories: post, metal and plain 'ol.
PROS: Over 12,000 hardcore bands can't be wrong. Store options.
CONS: This is the place for hardcore, but most other genres are not represented.

RADIOTAKEOVER
Radiotakeover.com
AUDIO: Streaming & radio
CONTENT: Plenty of indie, hard music.
PROS: Many hard to find bands
CONS: Design is cluttered, not enough music.

STEREOKILLER
Radiotakeover.com
AUDIO: Streaming & radio
CONTENT: Hardcore, metal, punk, etc.
PROS: Huge community of music fans, viewer reviews and good navigation
CONS: Needs more music, only 2 mp3s per band

Seven System

BY DAVID STAGG

Hollywood's rumored to be a good place to be, as long as it doesn't fall off into the ocean. It'd be a shame, too; you'd have the West coast mecca of music floating belly-up in the Pacific. Bands like The Doors, Buffalo Springfield, and The Go-Gos got their start entertaining the masses there, but now, metal giants Seven System want their shot. "It's our first time at a venue like the Whisky," guitarist John Vanus says of an upcoming gig at the world-famous Whisky A Go-Go on the Sunset Strip. "Of course we're looking forward to it. What's interesting is that we're pushing to move into the secular market."

Seven System, a quintet from Riverside, CA, whether they like it or not, will not only push themselves into a secular market, but perform in the very place where go-go girls were conceived. But that's not phasing anybody. "(Christian culture) has taken the being separate from the world – you know, we are in the world, not of the world – just completely to the far extreme," singer Matt Pruett says. "If you read the Gospels, Jesus' whole ministry was hanging out with these people that the Pharisees said were filthy."

And Seven System is ready for whatever comes along. They're beginning to play completely with secular bands. At their CD release party, a show they put together, only one other band was Christian. "It was received well," Vanus continues. "We're not hiding the fact that we're going into the secular market."

Seven System's latest contribution to the music scene is the seven-song powerhouse *Altered States*, a brutal eclipse of thick guitars with contrasting melodic vocal intricacies. But at the heart of it lies what's most important, Seven System's moral mantra: Religion is dead – it's God that lives.

"The traditional American values are ultra-conservative," Pruett says. "I think that the Gospel itself never changes, but the message and the message that we preach needs to continually be renewed for a newer generation." And if it needs to be renewed, the metal message is as good a way as any. "In society today, and in music in general, it's just so negative," Pruett explains. "I listen to a lot of secular music … (but) sometimes it's a little too much and the message just gets, you know, out there. If you go to a church that preaches down at you the entire time and tells you how terrible you are, that doesn't really do a lot to build up the person. I feel that we need to build people up. The Gospel truly isn't about tearing you apart, it's just letting you know, 'Hey, this is where you're at, but this is where you could be. And this is where, ultimately, everybody wants to be.'"

Following on the heels of its tour with Demon Hunter, **Dead Poetic** has been out on the road with Papa Roach most of the summer.

And speaking of **Demon Hunter**, its song "My Heartstrings Come Undone" has been included on the *Resident Evil 2* soundtrack, alongside metal monsters Killswitch Engage, Slipknot, A Perfect Circle, and bands like The Used and Thrice.

Beloved has been tearing it up on the road lately with Between the Buried and Me and Glass Casket.

Acceptance has also been out on the road as of late, touring with Gatsbys American Dream and The Snake The Cross The Crown. Acceptance should have their Columbia Records debut album out in early 2005.

Foreknown will be headed into the studio next month to record their new album *Calm Seas Don't Make Sailors*. The full length is scheduled for a November release on Blood & Ink Records.

Metal Blade Records has signed **Winter Solstice**. The band will be going into the studio in October to record a full length album for the label.

As I Lay Dying's video for the song "Forever" premiered on Uranium and Headbanger's Ball. Look for them to be on the road with Shadows Fall, Himsa and Remembering Never. The dates are up at Asllaydying.com.

After finishing up some amazing performances on this year's Warped Tour (one appearance had the crowd breaking down the barrier to get closer to the band – resulting in the band moving to a better stage), **Underoath** will be touring with Senses Fail and The Bled from September through October. Tour dates are online at Underoath777.com

LIVE REPORT

BY DOUG VAN PELT

The 21st annual Cornerstone Festival has come and gone. What was the standout highlight? Was it the amazing set by The Alarm or was it the cool weather? Or should it be judged by the bands whose CDs I want to listen to more and more as a result of a great show (like Sleeping At Last)? Whatever criteria used, there were many moments of raw joy that took place in Bushnell, Illinois this year over 4 days this past July 4th weekend.

THE ALARM

Rounding out a solid Friday night after the mainstage bill featuring Further Seems Forever, Blindside, and P.O.D. (as well as a gallery stage set by The Lost Dogs) was a highly-anticipated and first-time appearance here for The Alarm, who commanded the stage with a quiet confidence that seemed to be a notch above 98% of every other performance over the weekend. Maybe it was the bias of these ears, but I'm more inclined to think it was the power of flat-out great songs (of which this band's catalog is full of) that kept coming, right on top of each other.

SLEEPING AT LAST

With little fanfare and a ridiculously small audience Sleeping At Last began their set with chiming guitars and lots of keys. While comparisons to Aireline, Copeland, and even Thom Yorke's vocals may come to mind, "beautiful" would be a more apt description. The band is super tight live and crafts a full and lush wall of sound that trips the listener up and sucks 'em down into vocalist Ryan O'Neal's hypnotic journey. The band defines its own sound and diversifies by switching between guitars and keyboards to carry the melody along.

NORMA JEAN

Always a crowd favorite, it's amazing that this band can alter its lineup and still deliver the controlled chaos that they are live. The band played a perfectly timed "evening encore" that began at midnight on Friday and went well past 1 am. They set up a large projection screen at stage right to occasionally show moving picture images that add to the band's stark and strange image. Marilyn Manson would be proud of both the campy and institutional vibe that comes across with these tasteful images.

Clockwise from left to right: Beloved, He Is Legend, The Chariot, Holland by Doug Van Pelt

These visuals acted as a perfect break from watching the band gyrate and crash around the stage, with their silhouettes lit up by intense strobe lights. The new vocalist, Cory, introduced himself and staked his claim as this band's more than capable frontman. Adding to the show's celebratory nature, mewithoutYou singer Aaron Weiss jumped onstage for a song, bouncing around between other members like a pinball, adding his trademark spins. The band's last vocalist, Josh Scogin, came out as well, dueting with Cory and riding on shoulders and launched into the audience more than once. Derr and Scottie Henry both played some cool hammer-on runs with their left hands, while holding their picking fingers under their nose, looking at each other like it was a secret handshake or something. The crowd was loving it.

AS I LAY DYING

Drummer Jordan Mancino really stood out during this great fest-ending set. He pounds the skins like the great ones (Bonham, Grohl), and he doesn't let up throughout the entire set. He even manages some helicopters with his hair. Like a few Tourniquet shows I've seen in the past, it would be worthwhile to watch this band play from behind the drum stool. He's good. The twin guitar attack showed that these other guys aren't slouches, either. A perfect and brutal ending to a great festival this year.

[For a more in-depth review, visit hmmag.com]

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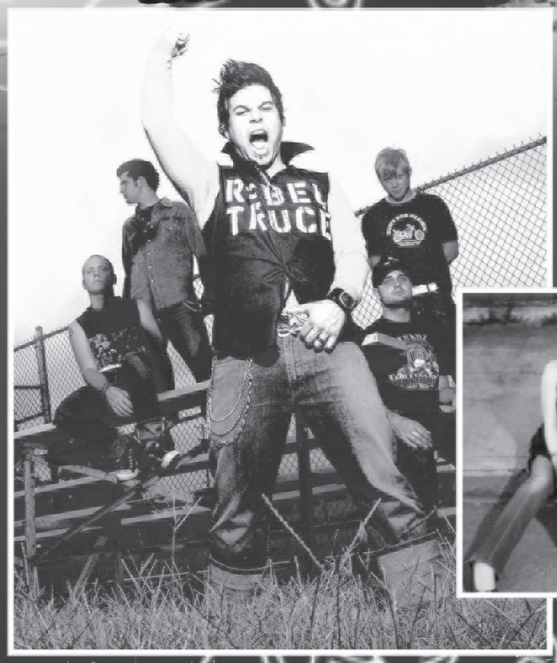

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METAL NEWS

Nineteen 88 is the new creation of the handsome Mick Rowe, joined by ex-GS Megaphone sitar/guitar player Chris Freeman. In the same vein as The Darkness, they unashamedly throw themselves into the throwback groove hard rock of AC/DC. The thing they have going for them is that they hold nothing back, going so far over the top that it will attract fans for the fun factor and turn off their musical enemies so far as to incite mockery. It really works for most of the album, with guitar solos and brash lyrics flying everywhere. But the album comes screeching to a halt with the ridiculous "Metal Pokey." Oh my gosh, this is bad. Even playing it for your friends as a joke won't last through the song. People will break stuff. Trust me on this. [nineteen88.com]

Mexico City will be the host of a must-see concert on November 20th. **Saviour Machine**, **Mortification**, and **Narnia** will headline. Rumors abound about a classic Christian metal band from the 80s playing as well, but that hasn't been confirmed as of press time. We'd expect bands like Subterraneo, Exousia, and Deborah to show up as well, but this isn't set in stone, either. It already sounds like a memorable event. [revolutionmetalfest.com]

DVDS

Bride has delved into its video vaults and jumped headfirst into the DVD format, releasing 4 separate DVDs. You can get a glimpse of their early metal years (*Bride Metal*), when their first three albums featured double bass and twin guitars with Dale Thompson's patented screams fitting right in (and there's that spandex issue, too). The handheld camera doesn't sit still long enough for a pleasant viewing, though. There's their acoustic side, which is also handheld (crappy) footage. Highlights include the blues standards "Jesus on the Main Line" and "Sweet Hour of Prayer." The moving "Sweet Louise" shows up in two different performances from two different eras of the band. The best (and only high quality one) of the bunch is *Under The Gun Live*, which was filmed with multiple cameras in a packed-soccer stadium in Sao Paulo, Brazil. This 1993 concert is really a sight to behold, as it shows the band at their peak form, comfortably fitting inside giant grooves. The performance of "Under The Influence" (previously seen on the *Heaven's Metal Video Magazine, Vol. 2*) has a passionate performance of "Bullet the Blue Sky" segued right in the middle of it; and, to top that, they deliver "Hired Gun" with Zeppelin's "In My Time of Dying" in the middle. This is the band's shining moment, for sure, showing their talent to lock in and go with the vibe and flow. As out of fashion as the band may be now, they had the rock and roll mojo back then, and it was good. The '94 concert in Germany shows the classic *Snakes* lineup of Jerry, Rik, Troy, and Dale playing the heavy thumping tunes from *Scarecrow Messiah* ("Murder" and "Beast"), as well as a G'N'R styled "Knockin' On Heaven's Door," but it's all handheld camcorder footage (and hideous). [bridepub.com]

Ted Kirkpatrick's *Circadian Rhythms* acts as both an instructional video (minus the instruction, just great performances shot from a perfect training perspective) and a keen insight into his mind. He shares some fascinating facts about nature and its rhythms. Perhaps these are the ideas that help him create the multiple rhythms he plays for Tourniquet. The drumming tips and inspirational references are good stuff for any drummer to hear. It's put together well, meshing some choice drum playing with outside glimpses of Ted's life (like fishing, etc). [tourniquet.net]

Glass Hammer has released a live DVD (*Lex Live*) and CD (*Live At Nearfest*) that shows these US prog rock masters at their best. Whilst utilizing more instrumentation than Dream Theater, they still come off closer to metal than, say, Yes or Spock's Beard. They're really world class musicians. A real treat here is the special guest appearance of Kansas guitarist Rich Williams for the cover of "Portrait." The video footage on the DVD is well lit, the solid lighting helps make up for the poor zooms and edits, but it is intuitive camera work (not focusing on the drummer during a guitar solo). It's also loaded with fun (but fans only) behind-the-scenes footage. [glasshammer.com]

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HE IS LEGEND

BY DOUG VAN PELT

So there I was, sweating and breathing out of the side of my mouth to avoid the smoke coming out of my friend's lungs. I was grabbing the opportunity to catch up with my busy friends in a touring rock band, as they awaited for Blaster The Rocket Man to finish their reunion set at this year's Cornerstone Festival. As we're talking, it becomes increasingly hard to hear what each other is saying, as a fast and furious band is blaring a high-energy set from a "generator stage," so named for its power, and not necessarily for the presence of any sort of platform to stand on. There they were – He Is Legend, taking the DIY opportunity to introduce themselves to as many as possible, even though they're now signed to Solid State Records.

Following a critically-hailed album released on Tribunal Records (*91025*), this Wilmington, NC band got the attention of Christendom's leading hard and heavy record label through the persistent efforts of their manager (who also manages Dead Poetic) and the band's dogged determination. After a demo session that yielded four songs that "sounded like four different directions," the ensuing rejection motivated the band to go in the studio last December "without thinking too hard" and record a full length's worth of songs. This ended up as *91025*, and also got the band an immediate offer from Solid State.

Just one month after *91025* was released, they headed into the studio with Killswitch Engage's Adam Dutkiewicz (who's produced Norma Jean and The Agony Scene) and recorded *I Am Hollywood*, which releases this Fall (November 2).

Mixing the melody of emo with the power of hardcore/metal will start reviewers searching for labels that won't induce the scorn that "screamo" and "post-hardcore," bring to the countenance of scenesters whenever heard. Much to their credit, they've been able to avoid the cliches that plague bandwagon bands. It's not anything amazingly new (bands like Thursday have tread this path before), yet He Is Legend still sound fresh and vital. The energy and competitive drive of youth (to always try to blow the audience away) no doubt assist them in their songcrafting, adding that element of urgency that keeps a band on the dangerous edge of keeping an audience uncertain of the next move. Will it be death by pummeling and throat-damaging howls or resurrection by tender singing? Are they trying to please Zao fans or swoon the girls in the audience that can't keep their eyes from frontman Schuylar Croom? For the most part, however, it's the tough guy / brutal metal direction they favor.

When it comes to choosing said direction, describes rhythm guitarist McKenzie Bell, "it all depends on what kind of mood we're in. If you had a timeline of when we wrote certain songs, like if we wrote two songs in a certain month, that would show you what kind of mood we were all in for that (whole) month." When pressed to describe their overall sound, Bell heaves a sigh of exasperation and confesses, "That is absolutely the hardest question we've ever had to answer for any interview. None of us listen to the same music. Everyone's influenced by very different types of music. To be honest with you, Schuylar has almost one of those Chino things (Deftones lead vocalist)… He's very influenced by female vocals – Bjork, Tori Amos, and Maura Davis (Denali). Guitar-wise, Adam is very influenced by metal bands – definitely death metal bands, but that never comes across in our music. We're just not that kind of band. We're very much a rock band. We've been categorized as hardcore, but that's really not where we feel comfortable saying we are. We may be a rock band that will have, at our heaviest points, a song that could be compared to a hardcore band, but we just consider ourselves a rock band for the most part." If they keep with their hard work ethic, rock will be the better for it.

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MOURNING SEPTEMBER

BY JAMES WETZ

Argument number one million and one in the debate that God is a music fan may come from the process involved in the formation of a Tulsa, Oklahoma rock band.

Tony Chavez and David Walker met in praise and worship at their church. Being in different bands at the time, they decided to start up a side project between the two of them. Through "conversations and prayer" the two began realizing that there might be "something more than just playing at church in store for us," said Walker. In 2001, with the addition of Josh Tipton and Zach Tietsort, an unnamed band was born.

"We had a show coming up, and we had no name," recalls lead vocalist/guitarist Chavez. "The month of September was a really crappy month for me, we thought (Mourning September) sounded cool, and it just stuck." And as many would remember, September 2001 was the date of a significant event in the U.S., which also weighed in on the decision.

With a growing fan base eagerly awaiting the official label-debut of Mourning September, Floodgate Records took them in. Along with the help of producer James Wisner, whose clients have included Dashboard Confessional and Further Seems Forever, *A Man Can Change His Stars*, was created. A good comparison can be made with FSF, not only in sound, but also in the fact that former Sense Field singer (and new FSF frontman) Jon Bunch provides backup vocals on two tracks for the new Mourning September record.

"I actually met Jon in the studio, and we had a great time," said Chavez. "He's definitely good company. It was a great experience working with him. I've always been a fan of Sense Field, so I felt really honored. As far as the other guys in FSF, we just met them at Cornerstone, FL. They're great guys. For me, they have been one of the many bands that have influenced me musically. They're a band that I've listened to and followed since they started."

A Man Can Change His Stars is rich with introspective songs (including the first single "Glorietta") that are influenced lyrically by Christian beliefs held by the band. Chavez points out that this should not be all too surprising, and also helps clear up what exactly the "Glorietta life" is that he describes in the single.

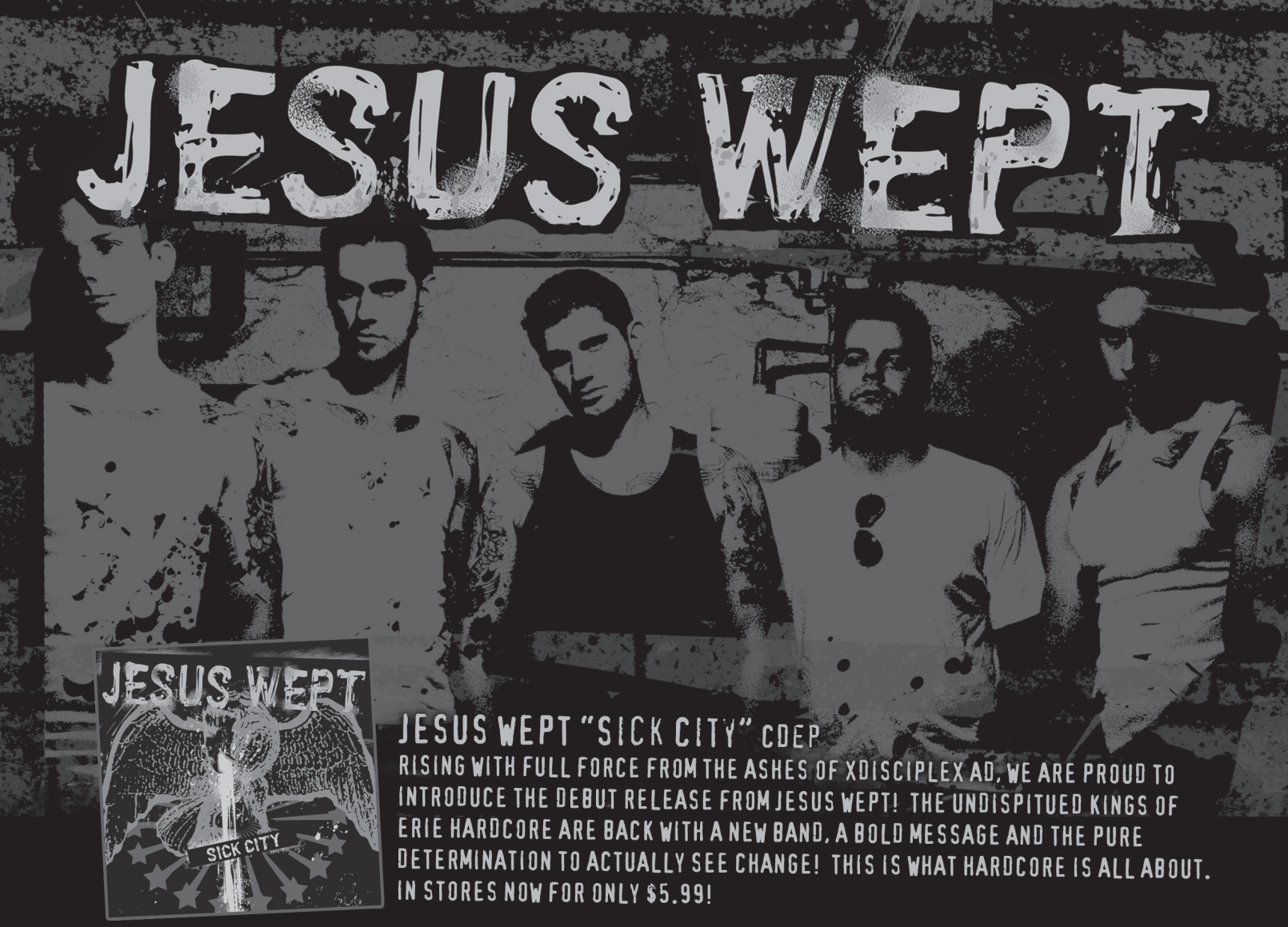
"It's hard not to be influenced by my faith when I write," admits Chavez. "I believe that if you have a relationship with God, it comes out in your everyday conversation. Not every song is directly about God, but I feel like He is there for us when we're having problems, and I think that message just comes out in our music, whether the song is about a bad relationship, or just any situation in life.

"To us, a Glorietta life is a joyous and peaceful life. I think a lot of times we deny that God's there for us, or we may feel far away from Him. We might go to bed feeling like our life is over, but this song is about God's promise to us, that when we wake up the next morning, it's a new day, full of new opportunities. We don't have to live our lives in regret, or accept everything that life throws at us."

Despite the obvious Christian connection, Mourning September has a sound ready for any market, and plans on playing "pretty much anywhere," whether that is churches with other Christian bands or clubs with secular contemporaries. Such desire to play and entertain can be observed in these live settings (which include the addition of guitarist/vocalist Brandon Yoder).

"We put our hearts into it on stage," said Walker. "I think people can see that we are passionate about what we do. I know I am pretty sore every night after a show. I mean, we aren't going to be the craziest band you've seen but we are definitely going to give you a rock show and stick some songs in your head."

JESUS WEPT



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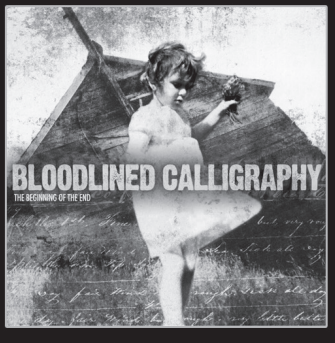

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12 STONES

BY DAN MACINTOSH

12 Stones has just released its second album, which it has titled *Potter's Field*. Its goal was to explore newer pastures with this latest release. And while it's impossible to miss Paul McCoy's distinctive, gravelly voice providing the lead vocals, the band also hopes listeners will pick up on its attempt to capture more of the band's live sound.

"We didn't want to overproduce the record," McCoy explains, while speaking on his girlfriend's cell phone. "We didn't want to overdo it and add too much to it. We just wanted to make a record that was pretty straightforward; but to change it from the last record we wanted to make it more guitar-heavy."

Second albums are nearly always difficult projects for new bands to complete, and this rule of thumb certainly held true for 12 Stones during the making of its latest.

"We were constantly on the road," McCoy recalls, "and when we were at home, we were just completely exhausted. We wrote little bits and pieces of it on the road, and then when we'd go home, we only had, like, three months or four months to really write the album and put all the pieces together and make what we wanted to make, in time to get it to the label."

To help ease the band through this difficult period of transition, 12 Stones turned to friend and colleague Dave Fortman to produce the album.

"He is the guy that recorded our first demo, prior to us getting signed," McCoy says. "It was the demo that got us signed. He's from our hometown, and we've known him from day one. He knows how to deal with us. He knows how to talk to us and get out of us what he wants and what we want. Also, his studio is, like, thirty seconds from my apartment. It's nice to wakeup in your own house everyday and drive over to the studio to make an album that you're really proud of, and that you're really comfortable when you make it. Rather than being stressed out, and trying to focus on things that really aren't necessary."

The title of this album, pardon the pun, is quite a grave one. You see, potter's fields are graveyards where the John and Jane Does of the world, the homeless and family-less, are buried. 12 Stones has developed empathy toward these disconnected ones.

"For these people, the Jane and John Does, they had a life at one point, and they had loved ones and family. But somewhere along the line they became a Jane or a John Doe. It kind of puts life into perspective and shows that what's gold to one person, is trash to another. It shows the anonymity of it all."

Speaking of anonymity, many people may only recognize McCoy's voice as that unlikely white rapper on Evanescence's hit "Bring Me to Life." But such a guest association has never particularly bothered McCoy.

"That was a fun moment for me and a proud moment for me," he says. "Plus, if they (fans) know us from Evanescence, then maybe they'll be a little more willing – if they liked that song – to check out 12 Stones. Anything that helps 12 Stones is worth it for me. I had a great time doing it."

Unlike Evanescence, which has been reluctant to trade upon its Christian music associations, however, 12 Stones recently headlined the high profile See Spot Rock Christian touring package.

"I think for us it's always been about not really worrying about where the other bands stand. At the end of the day, we're just honest musicians. A lot of our religious undertones come from me growing up in the Southern Baptist church my entire life, and learning from it and living from it. Now, a lot of the songs we write involve a lot of questions about what I question. I ask questions, and try to give answers to the questions I think everyday people need or are looking for."

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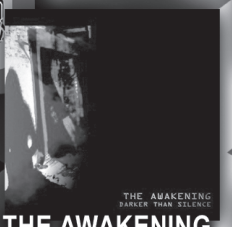

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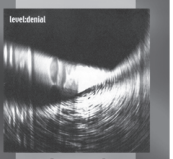

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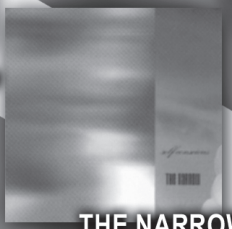

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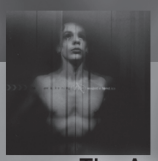

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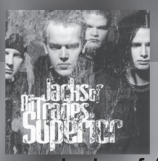

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SOCIETY'S FINEST

BY DAVID ALLEN

It's been over seven years. There was one release supporting tour years ago, but not much else on that scale. That album on Tooth & Nail was good. Actually, it was great. Hardcore, metal and hardcore with scattered melodies that worked. Long before singing was popular, long before breakdowns became disgustingly redundant, Society's Finest was complicating a sluggish genre.

There were two splits and an EP somewhere before and after the full length, but what matters now is that Society's Finest has finally pulled anchor and committed to new material.

After random touring and some time off, the members were itching to get back together and play shows every once in awhile. The idea was for the vocalist to fly out and visit the band (in Texas) from his home in L.A. and play a show or two – you know, to see what would happen.

"We also had some extra material and the tracks from the EP," says Josh Ashworth (vocals), "so we thought about putting together a CD to have it all on one disc."

But then Josh discovered that his friend Chris, from the band Evergreen Terrace, was starting a label with Eulogy Recordings founder John Wyle. Josh called up the new label and interest was sparked. An MP3 or two later and Society's Finest was sent a contract.

"Once we got the label interest the next step was hiring a manager. Then a booking agent... then I wanted to tour a bit and the booking agent was taking requests all over the states and overseas. So I realized it was time to go for it... full time."

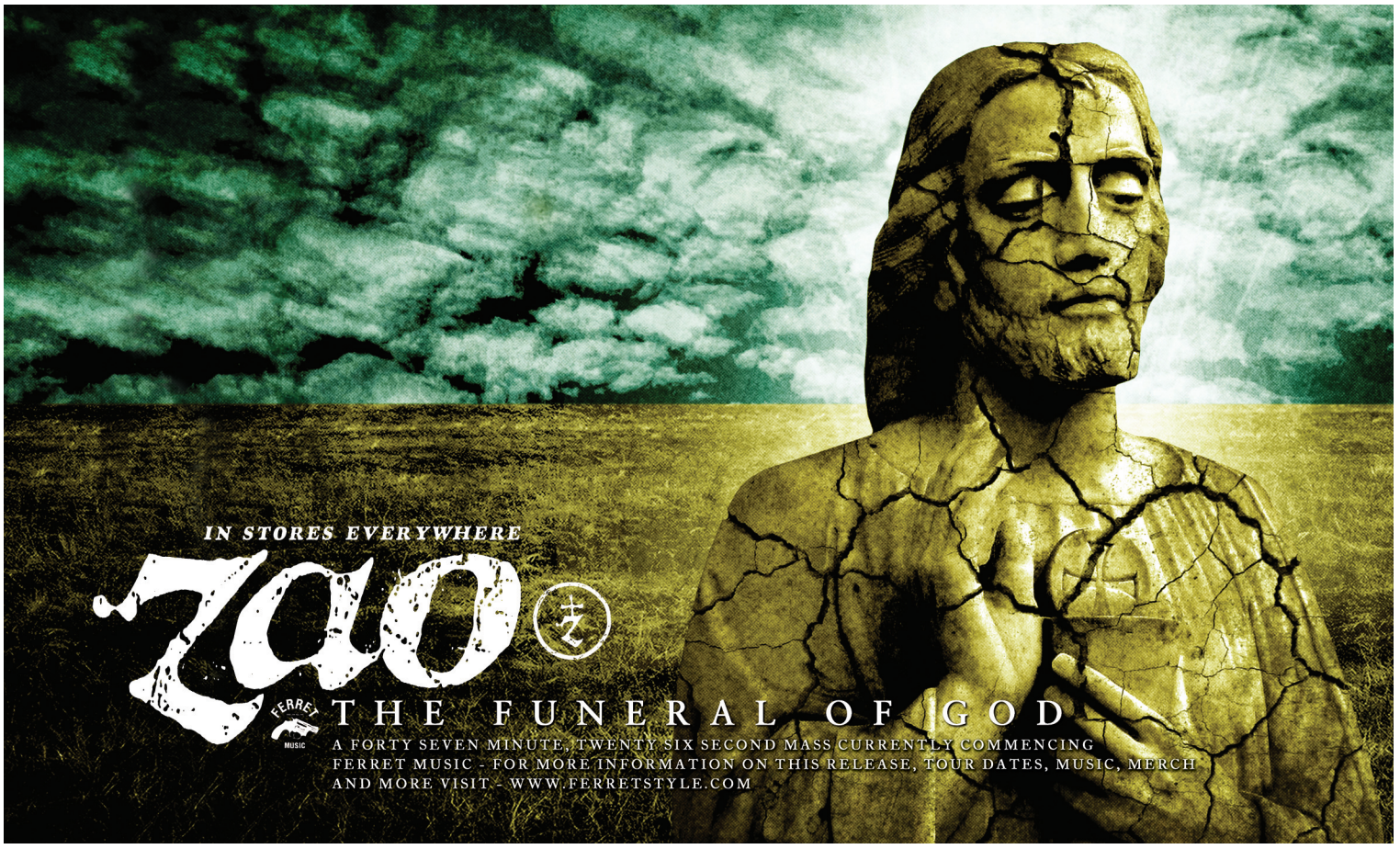
It happened fast and, the way things fell into place, the timing was perfect.

"This the last go around," says Josh. "I told the Lord that this is now or never. It just seems like this is when we, as a band, are supposed to take place. It feels good. Before we had obligations and nobody really wanted to step out and just do it. Something would always come up. It was frustrating at times – why didn't this happen three years ago? But it's all about timing. God's timing. I think the Lord wanted the band level headed and willing to seek Him no matter what their walk with Him was – just ready to step out and press on"

Not just stepping out, but doing so with God as the only one watching your back. And God may be big, but the size of starting a new life on the road can be overwhelming. If personal problems quickly distract the average person from a spiritual relationship, how much more difficult is leaving family, quitting work, finding transportation and doing so with a bunch of guys.

"You begin to wonder. About leaving life, needing money, if the band will work and will the response still be the same... but when it's all said and done, you just have to go out on faith."

During this interview, the band was headlining shows all over the country with local bands supporting. September had it hooking up with Gods (Jesse Smith's new band) and touring for about a month and a half. After that, who knows. But we do know that in February Society's Finest will be entering the studio and finally recording a new full length.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HAWK NELSON

BY DAVID STAGG

I have no idea who I'm talking to. If I figuring out which member of Hawk Nelson is talking to me right now were a game, I would lose.

The band, a pop-punk quartet from Peterborough, Canada, and I have previously arranged an interview on the phone. No problem, I figure. As long as they haven't disappeared or lied about their phone number, I can handle a phone call interview.

"Hello?"

"Yeah, I'm looking for Hawk Nelson?"

"Daaaavvve," I hear. The band, as I'll come to learn, isn't very good about letting me know who's talking; after a minute I come to find out it's Daniel Biro ("lead bass") who's answered the phone. After exchanging pleasantries, he puts me on hold for a second. I can handle being put on hold.

When Daniel comes back from putting me on hold, he tells me they just got the first edit of their "California" music video back. I mention that the song is a really catchy tune; I've never been to California, so I tell him. "Oh man," he replies, "this song is totally meant for you." I can handle not having been to California.

But within the next 30 seconds, Daniel virtually interrupts me mid-sentence to tell me the news that he's about to put me on speakerphone. As soon as he does, I realize something. Talking with the four members of Hawk Nelson on speakerphone is not something I can handle. I don't think many people could. It's virtually impossible. They all sound alike. They all talk at the same time. I've asked them to state their names before their responses, but, like I've said, they forget more than half the time.

First question: "How many of you are there?"

All at the same time: "4," "us," "40."

"There are 40 of you all?"

"We're a big band," Matt says.

Even though drummer Matt Paige was kidding, it still feels like there are 40 of them, each one going a mile a minute. And why shouldn't they be? They're just four pop-punk kids relaxing in their hometown again, having wrapped up a tour with Plus One and Telecast, viewing their very own music video, enjoying their rapid success after joining Tooth and Nail's roster ("They helped us buy a trailer," Daniel says, not allowing for the situation to go without a joke. Then seriously: "They shaped us into who we are, really.").

It's highly doubtful the band (the other two being vocalist Jason Dunn and guitarist Dave Clark) will slow down, either. On July 13, their first full-length CD, *Letters to the President*, was released—and no, that's not W. they're referring to.

"*Letters to the President* is a song about, not necessarily the President of the United States of America or anything like that," Daniel says. "It's just more something in regards to someone in higher authority. We need to stand up for what we believe in. Voice your opinion."

When I talk to them now, they're still overflowing: They mention their love for Trevor McNeely ("He made the album sound like butter," Matt says); their label-mates Emery (When asked to name a song they wish they had written, Jason doesn't hesitate to say "The Ponytail Parades" off Emery's *The Weak's End*); and online journal mecca Xanga (two of the members have sites, under the names sickincanada and jasonhawk).

Even more specifically, they're excited about their first music video, which, as said before, they're just now viewing for the first time.

"What's it about?" I ask them.

After asking a question that any of them could answer, the band pressures Dave into talking, who up to this point has remained somewhat docile. They chant his name, and he finally relents.

"The plot of this music video is," he begins as if announcing an award on a television show before breaking off. "Do I have to like go through the whole thing?"

The rest of the band: "Oh yeah."

It's a funny moment, but one that doesn't seem characteristic of the band: one of them not wanting to talk.

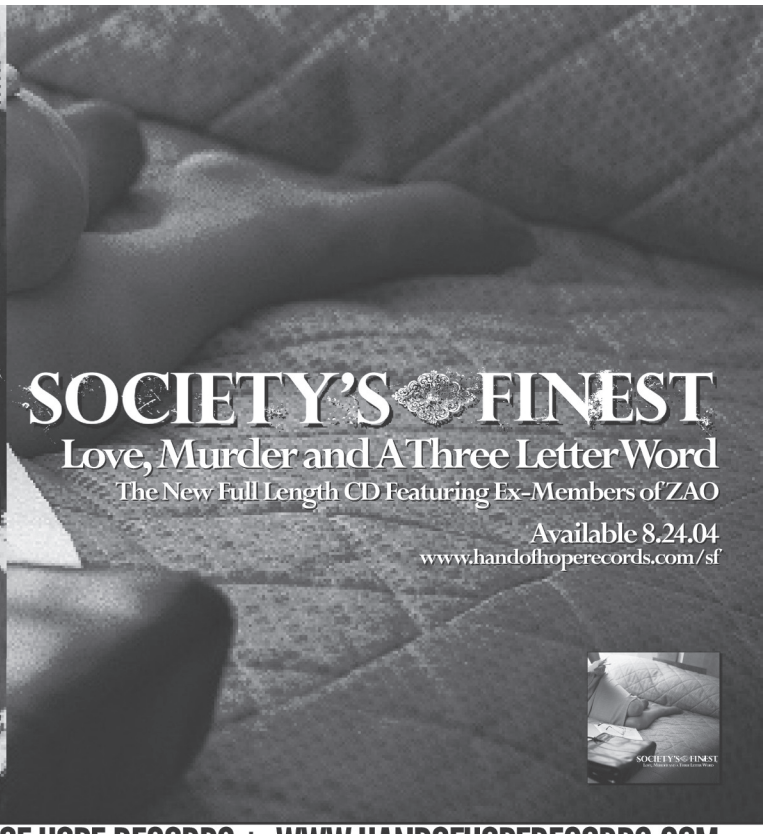
"OK, anyway, we're in a classroom," he finally begins, "and we're bored out of our minds. I guess Jason's daydreaming, and he gets this idea to go to California and all four of us are in the classroom. Writes up a note, passes it around, next thing we're heading out, going to California, hitchhiking and getting chased by the teacher for some reason." He starts to laugh about the concept. "Anyway," he finishes, "we're hitchhiking to California, we go there, everything's cool, having fun, playing music, hanging out on the beach being cool—"

"Looking really… cool," Matt says, mocking themselves in a slow drawl.

"Yeah, being really attractive," Dave jokes.

After a little more conversation, Hawk Nelson reveals to me that the trip in the video was a dream. You know, the plots that are always very disappointing.

"It's supposed to be really funny," Daniel explains. It's very representative of how the band acts in real life. "You'd probably compare it to a *Dumb and Dumber* or Relient K-type style. We have one scene where we tie our shoes and put them around our neck and we're walking like slow motion on the beach. But I hope people don't actually think that we're trying to be cool, 'cause we're not. It's a joke."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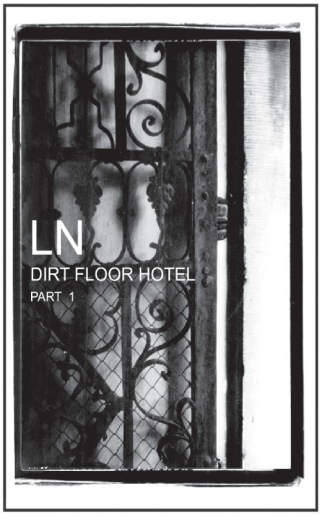

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MEWITHOUTYOU

TO: D. Allen
FROM: A. Robinson.
RE: Notes for mewithoutYou store.

Debut record: [A->B] LIFE. New title [tentative]: Catch For Us the Foxes. Label: Tooth and Nail.

TO: D. Allen
FROM: A. Robinson.
RE: Notes for HM story about mewithoutYou. Debut record: *[A->B] LIFE*. New title [tentative]: *Catch For Us the Foxes*. Label: Tooth and Nail.

Fletcher's Pub, Baltimore, MD.

- The set's fiery second song, "Bullet to Binary," didn't get a great performance despite the excited cheers of the audience. The brand-spankin'-new song just before it—during which vocalist Aaron Weiss recited more than he sang—fascinated me, though. This new stuff has originality and zing.

- Somehow Rilke's line from the first "Duino Elegy" seems appropriate: "Beauty is as close to as we can well endure." mewithoutYou can seem downright horrifying at times. In the song "Gentlemen," when Aaron sang, "Well, I'm coming back," the band's furor halted long enough for every thug in the audience to throw up his fist and threaten, "and you'd better be alone!"

- So I asked Aaron if the lyrics got any brighter on the new record.

- Guitarist Christopher Kleinberg and I joked about how to mention the release of *Catch For Us the Foxes* [check reference—Song Of Solomon 2:15?], the new album title they're considering. They'd just finished recording a few weeks before and were in the process of making final mixes; they hadn't even settled on a release date, hoping to push the line back a little. As of this interview, Chris says the proper phrasing would be, "The drops September 21." He mimed the headline in big block letters with his hands.

- But according to Tooth and Nail, they got an extension until October 5.

- Aaron has a dark complexion and a serious, unassuming demeanor. At first I thought he was just a tad slow, but I was confusing his lucidity for simplicity. His words rise from a great distance, like the back of his mind. He has a deep understanding of the problems Christians face today and the responsibility he faces as a musician.

- So when I asked Aaron if the lyrics got brighter, he said, "It doesn't look good."
  "What doesn't?" I asked.
  "The world," he said, "is bad." And then my tape recorder clicked off.

- Chris's wife, Nikki, kept offering me sandwiches, but the cold cut tray was depleted of cheese because almost everyone in the dressing room was mostly vegetarian. So Aaron and I took a break and broke Texas toast together. Aaron and Rickie Mazzotta, the big-bearded big beater, are featured on PETA2.com for their pro-animal rights positions.

- Nikki wanted a root beer float.

- Before I flipped the tape, Aaron said, "Can I ask you a question?" He wanted to pray before we continued with the interview. How stupid of me not to have suggested that. I'm always wishing I had thought of something first. So he prayed for God to forgive us of our vanity.

- "A really good root beer float needs to have whipped cream and a cherry," I said. Chris nodded in agreement.

- I flipped the tape and asked Aaron:
  You said the world is bad. What did you mean?

- He said:
  Well, for me it's an unbearable thought that there's no God, that all this is just all and has no deeper significance or meaning. That doesn't seem true to me. It doesn't seem right, and yet it seems to be the direction that, you know, most of our generation is going. For a lot of people it's like faith is a matter of the past, or a superstition or only rural or sociological study of what people believe and that, "Man invented God," *et cetera*. The more we discover with science, the more technological advances, the more we can master nature and the creation, I think the more we'll become convinced that we are the highest intelligence; whatever there is to discover we will discover. There's nothing beyond our comprehension or understanding—and to me it just seems like the deepest arrogance to disprove God. That's not to say I expect everybody to believe what the Bible says, but as *I* understand God, God is everything that's good, God is everything that's merciful, compassionate. All of love belongs to God. All goodness and gentleness.

- There is an island off the coast of Maryland where a lot of famous ponies live. They swim there or something. It's called Asatigue Island. Rickie asked if I had been there. Apparently the horses chew on your tent at night.

  "They go through your stuff if you leave it out," Chris said.

  Nikki agreed. "They must know what's going on."

  "They tourists," I said.

- I said to Aaron:

  How do you respond to the frustration of the way you see things turning? How do you respond to that lyrically? I understand that's an annoying question. More specifically, do you try to do address these problems with your lyrics?

- His answer was beautiful.

- When I first arrived in Baltimore for the interview, I could hardly find a parking spot. The club, a neat little two-story place called "Fletcher's" is among a mesh of brick roads. I got lost.

- I'll quote Aaron's beautiful answer at length:

  No, I don't expect to turn back that great movement of doubt—nihilism or atheism or whatever it may be. I can only try to communicate my love for God. My response—or any of our responses—to people who disagree with this isn't to try to convince them that we're right and they're wrong. I think in a lot of cases what they're rebelling against isn't goodness or kindness or even faithfulness, but maybe just the hypocrisy that they've seen in the church. You know. They go to a place full of people that are claiming to follow the man who said, "Do not judge or you'll be judged," and in the place (which is called a church) they encounter all this judgment and self-righteousness. I've seen that myself and it's made me question my faith and say, "Well, if this is what it means to follow Jesus, then I don't want to follow Jesus," because it just doesn't seem right.

  But then you look back at what it meant to follow Jesus when Jesus walked the earth and you can say—well, at that point it meant . . . well, certainly different things to different people . . . but it always seems to have something to do with taking up our cross and following. It's a matter of self-denial, of sharing in the suffering and poverty, poverty in spirit, hunger, isolation. These are all things that are not attractive ideas. You're probably not going to bring people into the building and get their 10 percent by preaching, "Yeah, uh, we have to go hungry."

  When I think of what it means to follow Jesus, that's what I keep coming back to: sharing in his suffering. . . . there just seems to be a lack of reverence for things that are holy and true . . . It just seems like the whole thing might be drastically off. . . .

  Can a bad tree bear good fruit? Jesus says it can't, and sometimes I think that Christianity has become—at least in the context that I see it as it is now—with all the luxury and the wealth and general indifference to the suffering of others I say, "Well this is a bad tree and it makes me wonder."

- Some of the songs from Catch For Us the Foxes really rock, but in general the album is drastically different from *[A-->B] LIFE*. The title should suggest that. *Catch* expands the mewithoutYou sound in a number of directions. It's what one might call a "mature sophomore effort."

- Nikki wants Chris to put root beer floats on the rider for the rest of the tour. A "rider" is, I guess, the list of amenities a band requests. (Working at a hotel in downtown Milwaukee, I read a lot of these things. You should see the food backstage at a Red Hot Chili Peppers show.) (And why do the White Stripes need two busses?)

- The gist of Aaron's beautiful response is something I think most Christians are familiar with. I read it to my mom and she said she thinks a lot of churches are making genuine, positive efforts in the right direction. I don't think Aaron would disagree. But his comments about self-righteousness aren't what strike me, anyway. What I like about what he said is the line, "People aren't rebelling against goodness or kindness or even faithfulness."

- We need Christian rock like this. Rock that understands what it means to not be a Christian.

- About *Catch*, Rickie says "the songs are definitely different in the sense that they are leaps and bounds better than what we were doing." While he's quick to say he still loves *[A --> B] LIFE*, on the new record, he says, "the band has grown up in their style and songwriting . . . Five guys are all coming from five different places—Brit pop, indie rock, punk, classical, dub, oldies—no two guys in the band have the same taste, and I think that really shows."

- Everybody (you know, *The Onion* and *Rolling Stone* or whatever) is always like, "*Ooh*, Sufjan Stevens! *Ooh, Seven Swans*! Okay, it's Christian but still, I mean, he doesn't like, *preach* at you or anything." That's exactly what I'm talking about.

- Here's another thing I like concerning Aaron's beautiful point: no one s faithfulness, but at the same time very little of what we call "faith" matters. As a rural phenomenon, it constantly undergoes shifts in meaning. In 19th century Russia, for example, it was unheard of not to believe:

  "'I suffer'," says a lady in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, 'from lack of faith'.

  'Lack of faith in God?'

  'Oh, no, no! I dare not even think of that'."

  A generation later such a statement would earn you a Siberian vacation. Ultimately the only thing that matters is the faith *you* have as an individual and the faith *I* have. What Christians have to hope for and to work for is a community of individuals who choose faith without a ure that imposes it on them. Saying that we are "one nation, under God" only has meaning when you say it because you want to.

- I know what you're thinking. Considering their position, does it freak out the rest of the band to have Aaron writing all the lyrics? Chris told me they hadn't been doing a lot of interviews, but when they do, they most often defer to him. "People will come up to us after shows," he explained, "and we just point to Aaron. He has the most to say about this stuff."

  "He's got the biggest vocabulary," someone laughed.

- Bassist Dan Pishock was programming the sequencer (or some other hi-fi thingamabob) before ripping into another song from the new record when someone in the audience heckled something unintelligible.

  "What?" Aaron asked.

- "Quote John Donne!" the fan yelled.

- This is how Rickie feels about Aaron being the mouthpiece for mewithoutYou:

  At times this is scary. I don't always agree with everything he says on stage or off stage or in a song or an interview, so it is tough to fully back him up, [but] not tough in the way you would think. People usually ask me about him and I in no way could do him justice. I do relate to things he says and we usually have great discussions about life; it's just, his lyrics don't represent everyone in the band and I think it is hard for people who see us to separate the two. I think he is a better vocalist/lyricist than any other person out there. He knows how to corner you and make you think, 'Dag, I have been such an... I gotta change'. I like backing him up.

- *World* Magazine, the news-weekly-with-a-Christian-purpose, is sponsoring a short story contest. They're trying to promote quality Christian literature, but their stories don't necessarily have to address faith issues. The important thing is that it transcends the superficial, formulaic art that has become so standard in the Christian niche. Like *Seven Swans* and mewithoutYou, this is what I'm talking about.

- Although I didn't get a chance to talk to him much, I got a really good feeling from Dan. When I was at my wit's end, having spent two hours in contemplative conversation with Aaron, Dan walked past me and casually asked was I doing all right.

- Here is what Aaron said in response to the kid who asked him to quote John Donne. It's funny:

  Not only can I not sing or play an instrument, I've also stolen all the lyrics I pretend to have written. So what *does* qualify me to be on this stage? Mike says it's my looks, but that's vanity because he's my brother and people say we look like twins.

- Aaron's brother Mike is a hockey guy. On the road he plays whenever he can find a game, otherwise he just works on his slapshot.

- The new record was produced by Brad Wood, who has worked with tons of bands, from Liz Phair to Sunny Day Real Estate. "You would be looking at pictures on his wall or he would tell a story and you would have to be like, 'Wait a minute, you did that?' He was in Tortoise for crying out loud!" Rickie said.

- After Aaron's beautiful point that I quoted above, there was a long pause. Then he said, "That's what frightens me. On the one hand I see people who have rejected God . . . but then on the other side you have the so-called church, and *oh man*, this doesn't seem like it."
- That *is* a big problem.

- Played live, the new songs sound so original that it took some getting used to. At times I wondered what Chris was trying to do with his open-chorded, swooping guitar parts, but the instrumentation usually became coherent by the song's end. This made sense, by the way, when I glanced at his gear; he must be *Musician's Friend's* best friend, what with every kind of pedal anyone will ever dream up.

- Here's the bad news. The "In God We Trust" stamp that we spend on our money and the phrase "under God" that we recite in our pledge will probably be scratched out someday. Our official, mundane, gray-matter existence will become an empty chamber of Godlessness.

- Rickie, who described the new songs as "airier" and more "rhythm-based," filled up two books of crossword puzzles during the recording of *Catch For Us the Foxes*.

- Here comes the good news. Who cares? Christian life happens on another plane. Our communication with God isn't through these outward icons but direct—by intercession through Christ and the observation of God's creation. Let the government have their coins. Give to Caesar what's his; they were never ours in the first place. Why should they matter to our faith?

- (I'm loathe to compare the effect of Chris's effects to U2's the Edge, but there are similarities. Most striking is the way listeners have to change their preconceptions about what a guitar is supposed to do, what it's supposed to sound like, especially when it's performing hard rock. The difference between Chris and the Edge is that, well, Chris's style still sounds vital because it's still evolving. Which is to say it's "punk.")

- Also, Mike says they played a lot of Texas Hold 'Em during the recording process. Rickie pined for his eight-bit Nintendo so he could play *Blades of Steel*. Everyone in mewithoutYou is a fun guy, a sharp personality and a good conversationalist, and here I am putting words in their mouths. Even Aaron never mentioned the attempt to get the "under God" phrase removed from the pledge, so why do I bring it up in an article about them?

- Because mewithoutYou are on the forefront of the Christian rock scene. They get it. Here is the pithiest thing Aaron said during our interview:

  Sometimes I think my only responsibility as a Christian musician is to quit being a Christian musician.

- But that would be a tragedy, a huge loss for the Christian rock scene. Because what if the 20-year-old who asked would I buy her a beer if she gave me the money, who chain-smoked through the show, and who approached Aaron after the set with a mouthful of apologetic "g*d*mns" had never crafted her kitschy but well-intentioned mewithoutYou shirt? What if she never got to see Aaron's understanding smile as she tried to come up with an acceptable substitute like "goshdang," or never got encouraged by his position on animal rights? What if she was never able to associate all this with the Christian music scene?

- She might be left to think Christianity was territory for self-righteous judgment-makers, never for someone like her.

- "*Quote John Donne.*" If I had a nickel for every time I heard that.

- ✖

Zao

LATIN ROCK

BY DAVID STAGG

RICKY MARTIN IS DEAD TO ME NOW. BACK WHEN HE LIVED—AND REIGNED—I KNEW EVERY WORD TO "LIVIN' LA VIDA LOCA" AND ODDS ARE YOU DID, TOO. I KNEW THE TRANSLATION TO ENRIQUE IGLESIAS' "BAILAMOS" BEFORE THE ENGLISH VERSION WAS RELEASED. I MARVELED—LIKE THE REST OF THE AMERICAN POPULATION—AT HOW WELL SHAKIRA COULD SHAKE ALL THINGS ANATOMICAL.

But by mentioning these names, I would be fooling myself if you haven't already synthesized their connection and opened the "where are they now" files in your head; it's possible the word "Ricky" was enough to make you do that. It's what happened when someone (perhaps the ubiquitous and equally mysterious no-faced "media" or "record label") linked the word "Latin" to an artist and it killed a record quicker than if you named your band Creed.

Apparently, no one told Los Lonely Boys. Or Del Castillo. And you know what? It hasn't made a difference. At press time, the Mexican-American Texas-bred Los Lonely Boys were skydiving towards the top of the Billboard Top 100 (#22), Top 40 Mainstream (#17), have already attained the #1 slot on the Billboard Heatseekers chart, and Jimmy Kimmel, Conan O'Brien, Jay Leno, et al. have booked the guys for late night appearances. Del Castillo is hot on their trail, doing work for *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* director Robert Rodriguez and recently releasing a live DVD—and both bands are proudly proclaiming to be Latin. Given the past—with the blacklisting of the term and a lot of artists sacrificing credibility by flying that banner—it would make one wonder: Who dares walk under the bridge when the supports have already buckled?

"He tells me the story now," Del Castillo singer and songwriter Alex Ruiz tells me, referring to the first time Austin-based director Robert Rodriguez saw the band perform about two years ago. "What's funny was at the time, I was working on my stage presence and I was wearing these shades and my fedora hat on stage and I had my bandana on. He tells me the story, 'Who is that guy? That old guy? They gotta get rid of that old guy!'" Ruiz laughs.

Del Castillo, a six-piece band made up of singer Ruiz, brothers Rick and Mark del Castillo, drummer Mike Zeoli, bassist Albert Besteiro and percussionist Rick Holeman, took to the stage around August of 2001 and has since been earning quite the reputation in the Southeast, winning over the likes of Rodriguez, the director of the highly successful films *Desperado* and *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*. Though Ruiz jokes about being old, it hasn't made a difference to their rapidly growing fan base; they've been on the cover of magazines and won awards for their music and videos alike, but the way Ruiz talks about it, it would seem as if the band isn't around to solely make music.

"We all unite in the same spirit; acknowledging God in everything that we do," Ruiz says about the band. "Every time we pray, it's worship. It's not work. We're making our work our worship, which is what we've always wanted to do all our lives."

Ruiz, a self-proclaimed Christian, points specifically to the fact that the Latin music they create, though not specifically worship music or Latin music or this or that, touches all walks of life. "It's kind of like what Paul the apostle said, 'Be all things to all people.' We're definitely being all things to all people when we perform, when we give of what has been given to us."

And the people that hear it commonly feel like they've been given a gift; the band's incredible live show has frequently left people calling it "The Experience of Del Castillo." I've come to call it treading thin water, what with that Latin term dangling from their genre.

"It is a little scary," Ruiz says. "You never know what's going to happen. You hope that your music is being listened to and appreciated. You never know if you're going to make it." He pauses and then reflects: "I think it's all in due time. It's actually supposed to happen. You can't make something happen if it's not going to happen."

He's now referring more specifically to the ever-growing popularity of Latin-based rock they're helping to pioneer. Well, almost pioneer. Santana has been paving the road for decades, but he seems to be the only name most Americans can still recognize as credible; however, it's not something the guys in Del Castillo consider. If God wants it to happen, it's going to. "Our prayer, every day," Ruiz says, for the band, "we're like, 'If it's Your will,' you know?"

The numbers have been good lately for Los Lonely Boys. They've already solidified their place in pop-rock music with their single "Heaven" attaching itself to the whistles of office workers who hear it on their daily drive to work. You almost can't help but sing the melody. Let's classify: Do the trio of Lonely Boys (who are actually brothers: guitarist and singer Henry, bassist JoJo and drummer Ringo) sound like Santana, or more like a Mexican-American Uncle Kracker, writing feel-good pop tunes you find yourself singing in the shower? By now, it's a moot point; people are liking it. Big named people. People whose names pull more weight than gravity. The uber-collaborative Carlos Santana joined them on stage once. Willie Nelson, who has called them one of his favorite bands, asked them to perform on his Memorial Day TV special with some guy named Keith Richards, "my name is Kid" Rock and social anomaly Jerry Lee Lewis.

Even still, the three brothers, aged 22-26, are supposed to be influenced by these powerhouses, not influencing others. Instead, they take notes from another one in their family: their father.

"We learned from him at home at first," Henry has said. "He would let us come to gigs and watch him, then when we got older he let us come up and sing a song with him. We listened to our dad more than the radio." Eventually, they began to play in his back-up band. They began to write songs together before Dad relocated them to Nashville. They began to solidify their sound, but after things began to derail in Nashville, they moved back to Texas. If they had failed in there, people would have asked, "Why move away from Nashville? It's the mecca of music." But as time would tell, they look like masterminds after gaining a reputation as one of the best live acts in Texas and the Southwest after polishing off their Texican sound.

And it would seem the U.S. is thanking them. They're omnipresent. Their video for "Heaven" is consistently ranked on VH1's Top 20 Countdown. Other little known facts: The Tonight Show band (the Kevin Eubanks one) had been covering their songs in and out of commercial breaks for a few weeks before the band made their debut on the show, with Jay Leno calling them "great." On Jimmy Kimmel Live, the band earned the show's first-ever standing ovation in its history, going on to tape two additional songs for air at a later date. The *Dallas Morning News* called Henry "the lovechild of Stevie Ray Vaughn and Carlos Santana."

But the band wouldn't be complete if it weren't heading towards heaven; their religious imagery perpetuates their music. The video for "Heaven" is shot in a church, the band is consistently seen with hands clasped as if in prayer, and—even more obvious—the words to the song: "Cause I know there's a better place / than this place I'm livin' / How far is heaven / and I just got to have some faith." The band even proclaims that the hit song was written as a prayer. If not believers, these actions will perplex more people than Scott Stapp's parade of innuendo.

But with or without religion, it's almost impossible to ignore Los Lonely Boys now, flying through the airwaves more often than airplanes. Love it or hate it, they have your attention.

Del Castillo, who are good friends with Los Lonely Boys, have been taking their forerunners' advice and listening to what's been buzzing around everyone's heads. "With Los Lonely Boys just shooting straight up—it's when you get to that level—they talk about numbers," Ruiz says.

There's that no-faced "they" again, the record label. When the market was flooded with Latin-based acts a little under a decade ago and the public started to reject the sound, the numbers dropped, and so did the artists.

"These people, once you're up at the top, it's all about numbers," Ruiz reiterates. Because of this—coupled with the recent Latin music whirlpool—both bands are going to have to fight for their place in the annals of music history. Can either stay afloat long enough to make it to shore? It's too early to tell, but according to Ruiz, it doesn't matter. What's happening right now is supposed to be happening.

"The good thing about this," Ruiz begins, "and the thing that really gives it away because God likes to play games sometimes—is how effortless it has been for us to really just come through. Those are blessings that are in disguise, favors that God is giving us. You're transcending languages; you're transcending barriers that people have put up. Things just always seem to work out."

Further Seems Forever

BY JAMES WETZ

Many bands "reinvent" themselves, but few have pulled the hat trick that Further Seems Forever is in the midst of. Their third full-length release, *Hide Nothing*, marks the debut of their third lead singer, former Sense Field vocalist Jon Bunch. Is FSF v3.0 ready to silence the nay-sayers again? They think so.

It's January 2004. The new year has clocked in, and one band that made a big push in the previous year is set to flex their muscles even more. The Tooth & Nail Tour starts up in less than a month, and Further Seems Forever will be the headliner of a formidable rock lineup. A new album is in the works, with instrumental parts already recorded. Having toured in the previous year and a half with bands like New Found Glory, Something Corporate, Finch, The Ataris and Yellowcard, the Floridians are sitting in a good position for 2004.

Then it happens. Lead singer Jason Gleason sends an e-mail to the band from across the country on January 14. In it, a simple resignation is registered. Further Seems Forever head into 2004 with a list full of tour dates, no singer, and half a CD. They literally have music without a voice.

"I have never received a call back or an e-mail from him with any reason as to his departure," explains FSF drummer Steve Kleisath on the departure of Jason. "As a matter of fact, the e-mail states that no discussions need to be had and no clarification needs to be given, so needless to say, it was a horrible way to go about leaving people who had shared their life, time, and art with him for the better half of the last 3 years."

Jason's message marked the end of yet another chapter in the turbulent life of Further Seems Forever, a band that began with a desire to create music that, as Kleisath says, "can be listened and related to for many different

people, regardless of a religious preference." Such humble beginnings spawned what would be years of hard work, great music, and more transitions than any band should ever be forced to go through.

Following the breakup of their hardcore band Strongarm in 1998, bassist Chad Neptune and guitarist Josh Colbert (along with Matt Fox of Shai-Hulud) wanted to start something new. The voice of this project was given to a kid named Chris Carrabba. The former Vacant Andys singer helped Further Seems Forever get off the ground, and helped his own career just as much. Before FSF's first full-length ever hit stores, Chris left to pursue a project of his own: Dashboard Confessional. But as much as the success of Dashboard would end up helping Chris' former band, FSF helped Chris spread his solo music to the world.

"The number of people who listen to DC and then listen to us and become really strong FSF supporters is great," recalls Neptune. "You have to remember that initially people heard of DC because of us. Chris sold his stuff at our table when we would tour and that's how it started."

Shortly after the successful release of *The Moon is Down*, FSF's debut on Tooth & Nail records, Chris Carrabba's replacement was found in Jason Gleason. Throughout his tenure, the band was faced with the daunting task of proving themselves against their own design. Not only did they have to display the ability to recreate songs from *TMID* without Chris in a live setting, they now had to establish an identity of their own. Near-endless touring and the release of the first post-Carrabba album, *How to Start a Fire*, accomplished that in the eyes of many.

Fast forward through the success of *HTSAF*, which ended up selling more copies than *TMID* to the surprise of many, and return to the end of January 2004. The Gleason years had come to an abrupt end, one that left a bitter taste in the mouths of fans and band members alike.

"It goes down to an ex-manager whispering in Jason's ear about what a big star he is. I really don't blame Jason. Look, the music industry is brutal. It all comes down to your image in the

public eye. We are normal looking guys, and Jason is a young attractive kid who can sing well. So we then become the expendable part," says Neptune, who seems understanding yet still perturbed. "It is as easy as; there is a right way to handle a sucky situation and a wrong way to handle a sucky situation. His was blatantly the wrong way!"

The situation nearly caused the complete demolition of the Further Seems Forever name, one that represents a lot in the hearts of those in both Christian and secular markets. Being on a Christian-based record label, yet not openly preaching to the public, has seemed to be a topic relevant to many bands, and FSF is no exception. Neptune tried to clear up some of that debate.

"Although we say we are not a Christian band, as Christians, everything we do is affected by our faith. I think we can all say it is about our relationship with God and it is important to involve Him in everything we do. Since day one I have said this is our career and in a career you make money. I don't feel comfortable making money by using God's Name. Not to say we are right, but that is how I feel. If I feel led to talk about the Word on stage, I will. If I feel led to just rock out, I will. With no preconceived notions."

Having built up a fan base with people understanding of this very sentiment, Further Seems Forever decided not to drop the name in favor of something new. Instead, they picked up the pieces and set out to re-establish what was rightfully theirs with the help of something that they believe God must have had a hand in.

In the days when FSF were fairly unknown, before *TMID* had ever been released, Chad Neptune was asked in an interview to name the best band that he had played with. His answer was "Sense Field," led by vocalist Jon Bunch. Several years later, Sense Field called it quits, not long before the time of Jason Gleason's departure. The timing of these situations resulted in the joining of Jon and FSF.

With an album of music already recorded, only waiting for lyrics and vocals to be inserted, Jon stepped in and "fit like a glove," according to Neptune. The finished product is *Hide Nothing*, the new edition to FSF's catalogue, and one with a title that may be more directed at a certain someone than the band would have you believe.

"The reason I like that title is because there is really no hidden meaning to it," explained Neptune. "Our other records were cool because each person took what they wanted from the title. Here it is in your face. HIDE NOTHING! Don't be a liar, you won't fool anyone, especially yourself. You can't suppress your feelings forever."

"We feel (*Hide Nothing*) is the best work that we created to date," said Kleisath. "The best thing that could've happened to us is having Jon sing with us now, as what he has contributed goes so well with the music that was already written. It is like he was always supposed to be with us."

Kleisath also believes that perhaps "divine intervention" played a part in bringing Jon to the band. Neptune would agree with that statement.

"Jon is such a great guy and an amazing singer," said Neptune. "He came in and totally added such individuality to these songs. That's something I don't think could've happened without the touch of God. We didn't want this music to be tossed aside. I can sit here and say to anyone that this is something I will always be proud to be a part of. What really comes through here is the struggle and triumph that we went through to record this record. It is dark and driving but still melodic and pretty. It is FSF in our finest hour, I think. I guess what really matters is that I think that. Maybe other people will see it different but at the end of the day it puts a huge smile on my face."

With such self-satisfaction, is it possible that the current band roster may stick for longer than one album? If trends continue, then no, but as the cliché goes, the third time is the charm. Only time will tell what the future has in store for such a well-weathered band, but Neptune knows where the control lies and where Further Seems Forever will end up:

"Wherever God's will leads us." ✖

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What **UNEARTH** Says

Coming together in 1998, Unearth has accomplished more on their own than most bands can do with full support of a label and press. Constant underground touring has built a solid foundation of truly dedicated Unearth fans. Unearth put forth such an energetic and heartfelt live show that they have gathered respect from their peers as well as admiration from the fans. Its newest album, *The Oncoming Storm*, has been released to great reviews. This interview was conducted with vocalist Trevor before the release.

Trevor Phipps: We've been on tour for about six weeks now, and we've been doing off day shows on this tour, so we've been working the days the rest of the tour is taking off, so we've had two days off in our six weeks.

DA: Good for you and good for the fans, but man, you need a break.
TP: Yeah. I know. The last show on the tour is May 14.

DA: On the Headbanger's Ball tour—are you allowed to do any side shows, or is that separate?
TP: Yeah, we're allowed to do side shows but they have to be a certain distance away from the show that headliners have. And also, headlining shows is like a secondary market. Yeah we're doing Ozzfest this summer but we still do shows within a certain mile radius. So basically we're playing small, small towns... like we played Savannah, GA, we played Birmingham, AL, we played Bakersfield, CA, I've never even heard of a show there. It was killer; all the shows are good.

DA: I bet the turn-out is great.
TP: Places that we've never played before.

DA: Are you finding out the crowd is different when you compare Headbanger's Ball and then going to, say, Bakersfield?
TP: Oh, totally different. The real reason why we took this tour—the Headbanger's Ball tour—is the different audience for us. It's more of your—I don't want to be... —metal, more of the kinda mainstream metal, it's a bit more than the underground. That's where we're from, the underground metal/hardcore scene. So this puts audiences that are more similar to the metal in to see us at Ozzfest, so we're kind of getting a head start by having the people at Ozzfest knowing our name.

DA: That's true. Actually, that's perfect; it makes sense. The crowd is interesting at Ozzfest. It's both hardcore kids and then...
TP: Especially this year. I'm sure they'll be a ton of hardcore kids this year because of the line-up, especially on the second stage.

DA: Yeah, the second stage is better. But it is cool to see some of the classic bands.
TP: Yeah, like Slayer and Priest with Rob Halford. They're amazing, but the second stage is like a bunch of our friends.

DA: That's so cool. I bet that's fun. Yeah, that's right—this is your first time on Ozzfest, right?
TP: Yeah, totally, it's our first year on Ozzfest and that second stage, it's just like, you know, that's all Hellfest. I'm not sure if you've heard of that, but that's all hard-core and metal bands. Most of the bands on that second stage are bands we've either toured with or done a number of shows with.

DA: That's got to be good times.
TP: Yeah, big party all summer. Summer camp.

DA: Summer camp (laughs). I went to church camp, that's a little different, um...
TP: Yeah, right. (laughs)

DA: So tell me about the new album—what's the date?
TP: June 29th on Metal Blade.

DA: You excited about it? And is it done?
TP: Yeah, we had to kind of get into high gear before this tour started 'cause I got sick. The music was finished and then it was my shot to do the vocals and I got sick with this really nasty throat infection. I got two or three songs done out of 11 tracks. I had eight more to do and I was like, ohh... I was out of commission for over a week. We lost all that time, then I had four days before we left for this tour. I just had to punch it out in four days—and luckily I did it and it sounds great.

DA: Good for you.
TP: We lucked out. If I didn't finish, then we would've had to post-pone this tour or something, post-pone the record, which wouldn't have been good, but... We're really excited about it.

DA: Do you think being sick affected your vocals at all?
TP: No, it didn't. It didn't affect it at all. I actually think it helped. I'm not sure if I had any kind of virus or whatever in my throat. For the first few days it was kinda weak and then I got on some medicine and I was stronger than ever. After I got the medicine, I think that actually might have helped me out a little.

DA: Now was the DVD pushed back?
TP: No, no; it's supposed to be out now at Hot Topic only.

DA: Oh so that's what it is; Hot Topic only.
TP: Yeah, for the first couple months. They have it exclusively for like two or three months or something and then when our record comes out, I think it's going to retail. I think you can actually go to Hot Topic and get it right now, or order it through distribution.

DA: Were you approached by Hot Topic?
TP: I think it's a combination of our label, our manager, and Hot Topic decided to do it. It's only two bucks.

DA: That's right. It's three songs.
TP: Yeah, it's three live songs from a show we did in Long Island, and it's

got some kind of backstage hangout footage of us just fooling around in the dressing room, and then loading the trailer at the end of the night. So it's pretty cool.

DA: You can't beat that. It's been a while since your last album. Are you excited just to get the new one out?
TP: Yeah, it's been cool to actually play new material on this tour. We're doing two songs a night, and then on the headlining shows, we're doing four. The last full-length came out January of 2001, and then we had the EP on September 2002, so it's a long time in between full lengths...

DA: And that was on Eulogy. I didn't hear much about it.
TP: Yeah, Eulogy Recordings. And that was the big reason why we moved on to Metal Blade. Eulogy was great, it was a great label to start on. This record could not have come out on that label because it just doesn't have the distro of a larger label like Metal Blade.

DA: I like that they cover a whole gamut of hard music.
TP: Yeah, they're great. They're really pushing As I Lay Dying and The Black Dahlia Murder right now. We're almost two bands up, which is awesome.

DA: You were talking about taking your new material and playing it on the road. I know your music is probably heavier, but has the response been as good as before?
TP: Yeah, it's been awesome because we've gotten better at writing throughout the years. The songs are definitely going over well with the crowd. It's great to play a song for the first time in a city these kids have never heard before and they're moshing, they're doing the circle pit, they're doing everything. They're chanting real loud. That means a lot. That means we do well. It really feels good.

DA: That's a good time. Now I have to get into some of your influences. It's good to know what the bands we listen to... listen to.
TP: Yeah, influences just range from Sabbath, Crowbar, we like Hatebreed to The Beatles and Nirvana. Those are all bands we grew up with, you know, Metallica, Anthrax. A wide range: there's rock and there's metal that we grew up with. On the hardcore side of things, we all love Sick of it All, Earth Crisis, Snapcase, stuff like that. So with those influences kind of combined helped us kinda make our sound.

DA: And you have the hardcore influence. But you also have some rock riffs. Are they still included, Crowbar style, on the new album?
TP: It's a great mix of everything we've done. It goes to a new level. The breakdowns are better—you can mosh to them a lot easier—it has really great heavy breakdowns. The metal got better.
(**his cell phone cuts out**)

DA: And your writing... are there topics here?
TP: I kind of went a bit more political on this record. I did have some political stuff on our earlier records. A song called "Fuel the Fire," "Only the People," "Internal War." My general theme is anti-war. Anti-unjust war. Sometimes war shouldn't happen, it just's just other—a thirst for oil, thirst for money, thirst for greed. Sometimes it's just what man is doing to fellow man. Also I'm tackling some ideas on polluting the environment, destroying where we live. If we don't improve on these things, then we're not going to be here much longer.

DA: That makes sense. So let me ask you something a little deeper—because you're kind of going that route—tell me why. Why care about the environment for people... why even care about people for that matter? So we live a better life? Just because? Or are we talking a bigger purpose, like a God kind of thing?
TP: I try not to put too much of any kind of belief in God into the mix. I have a few songs that kind of touch on that here and there. I wouldn't ever want us to be called a Christian band. Everyone in the band has their own ideas about God. We sometimes talk about it in the lyrics... But when I think about destroying, just dying... The planet's more than likely not gonna end in my life time, but I want to have kids, they'll have kids and my friends will have kids and you know, so on. For us to destroy each other or this planet is foolish.

DA: So you're talking about enriching life in general.
TP: We have songs just dedicated to enjoying your time here.

DA: So you kind of touched on it. God. Tell me about ... you have a Catholic background?
TP: Yeah, I was brought up Catholic.

DA: I've got Christian background, so I understand that base. Is it something you still adhere to, or is it something that was your foundation and now you've gone from that?
TP: It's the foundation, and that's where I get a lot of my beliefs, and kind of values. There's a number of things I disagree with in the Catholic church, so I'm kind of, right now, looking to find where I'm going to end up spiritually, but I'm in my mid-20s, I'm searching, I'm reading, and just trying to figure it out.

DA: Good for you.
TP: I think I'm at a place with my values and my beliefs that I'll eventually find out. What my version of the truth is.

DA: That's great to hear, man. Many people lay down some blanket statement and fail to see for themselves that they don't know and are searching. It's good to hear you say that.
TP: It's funny, most people, when they get old, all of a sudden—they find it... I don't know. Even if you're unhappy, what's the point in making other people's lives unhappy, you know?

DA: True.
TP: Get out there and have fun with your life. Just enjoy yourself.

DA: I can understand that. So referring to that base you were talking about, I'd like to ask you about what I've been dealing with. The basic premise behind Catholicism and Christianity is Jesus Christ. It's the whole Son of God claim. Do you have trouble with that, or do you find yourself believing?
TP: That's something I try to... well, there's God; that's something everyone kind of adheres to. But if it's one thing to anybody... to some people it just sounds like a fairy tale.

DA: Oh yeah, totally. It does at times.
TP: This girl got pregnant, and, oh, she didn't have sex, that can be debated for years.

DA: I agree.
TP: So, if that happened today, people would never believe it; they would say, "Yeah, right, whatever, she got knocked up by some dude," but back then it was different and if I was there... If only there were pictures or some...

–CELL PHONE GOES OUT–

DA: You're kinda breaking up, I'm losing you a little bit.
TP: I'm sorry, I'll move over.

DA: That's alright.
TP: This better?

DA: You were saying some great things, but your voice kept going out. It's good to talk to someone about this. So tell me where you were going with that, I didn't catch the ending.
TP: Believing in Jesus and believing he performed all these miracles... it would be better if you could see it, if you could see video, if you had a picture of it, instead of just believe stories that are written in a book—that's tough, you know, 2000 years later.

DA: You're right. It can be tough.
TP: I think that's why a lot of people are kind of straying away from religion in general. I have a song on our first record called "Monition," and the whole basis of the song is that I personally believe that religion, you know, cause each race has their own religion, people, humans in general seem to believe in God, and I think that religion was almost put in place—cause you know people believe in God—the rules of religion were just put in place so people would not just destroy and pillage and bring out their evil human side. It's almost like a law. People will break the law that man writes, but if God writes a law, you're going to hell because of it, then I'm not going to break that law. If I'm going to steal or kill someone and I just go to jail, big deal, but if I kill someone and I go to hell for eternity, then I'm not going to do it, definitely. (I'm talking about man in general.)

DA: So more importance because of a higher law?
TP: Yeah, because of a higher power. If you're doing that, you don't get to live, you know, your soul doesn't get eternal rest and you're down there burning in fire... You know, I think that's a big reason why religion with rules was put in place.

DA: As much as I like to be hanging out and living life, when all is said and done, I

do my best work—I'm my best person and I'm most creative as an artist—when I have a deadline... the constraints of having rules over me, "Hey, I'll get fired" or "Hey, I'll burn in hell."
TP: Yeah, fired and burning in hell, that's two different things. Which is more important?

DA: OK, that's good stuff, bro. Let me jump real quick to some of the bands that you've toured with. Could you name some tours or bands that stand out to you?
TP: Each tour just kept getting better and better as we got going with the band. I can't really say one band was the best, but there are a handful of bands that we've had the most fun with. Zao was a band that we would love to tour with again. We had a great time with them—

DA: They have a new album coming out.
TP: Yeah, coming out this summer— I can't wait. I'm not sure what went down, but I think some of the guys butted heads or something. I didn't see it on that tour so much, but I guess it kind of went down the toilet after a while. Dan is the voice of Zao for me anyway.

DA: You're right, I'm glad he came back... but it's bittersweet 'cause Jesse is gone.
TP: Yeah, it's weird, but I'm looking forward to the record. Poison the Well was a great tour, we got to do two tours with them. In Flames is really cool 'cause that's a huge influence for us. In Flames, for years, has been a huge influence on our band and the tour was a major influence of ours within the evening. That was really cool. What else... I don't want to miss any—Oh the tour last fall. The first Headbanger's Ball tour. We did half of it with Killswitch Engage and Lamb of God and that was a great time cause those three bands are like our best of friends. And Shadows Fall and Killswitch are from Massachusetts, just like we are. We're like childhood friends with them. We got to do three weeks with them that were just amazing.

DA: They're at a level now that's just incredible.
TP: Yeah, all three bands are just at an amazing level and we're hoping that with this tour and with the record and with Ozzfest that we'll get up to that level as well. We're doing really well. I'd like to get to that level with them.

DA: What does a next level mean? More exposure? More people get to hear your music—but how far does that go? I mean, it is some hard music.
TP: Yeah, I mean, I think that when Headbanger's Ball comes back it really brought heavy music to the forefront, and I was talking to Jamie last night and I guess Headbanger's Ball is the number one rated show on MTV2 right now.

DA: That's crazy.
TP: It's amazing. It was off the air for 10 years and now it's the number one most watched show on MTV2. I don't think the people ever went away, I just think the masses of communication—you know, TV and radio—ignored it for some reason. I don't know what it was. But they just put it away, and I don't know why they did. And the scene in the underground's just been growing and growing and growing and then they finally noticed with the record sales that were getting out there and they put it back on the air. Now it's just exploding. I mean, we're playing in front of a couple thousand kids a night on this tour, and with Ozzfest, almost every show is already sold out. That's unbelievable.

DA: That's cool.
TP: I mean, I grew up watching Headbanger's Ball. I was like eight or nine when I saw Adam Curry hosting it, and then it just went off from there and got better and better and then towards the end, it kinda went downhill towards the end, I think that's why it went off the air because they stopped playing heavy music, they would play Trickster and Firehouse and then have the Triple Thrash Threat and play three good videos a night. I would just end up hating it and fast-forwarding to the three good videos, but I think they're doing a great job with it this time around, cause you know, Jamie is definitely in there helping out.

DA: A good balance.
TP: Just a ton of good bands in there. But yeah, to answer your question, to get to a level where they're at—right now we're doing OK— but to get to that level and to call it a career for a number of years, it'd be awesome to call it a career... if it ever got to a point where Slayer is or where Pantera was, or like Anthrax or Metallica were before they hit the lighter side of things, that would be the most amazing thing ever. To do what we do now is the most amazing thing ever to us. Every night is like a dream come true. Everything that gets better from here, it's all gravy.

DA: So do you get nervous with the larger amount of fans? Or do you feed off that energy?
TP: I don't get nervous anymore, really. I just kinda get pumped up. My nerves do rattle, like a little bit, and I do get a bit tense, so unfortunately... I take two shots of whiskey before I go on and it helps out. I don't get wasted before I go on because then I'll just be a mess, but after two shots of whiskey I totally relax.

DA: That's funny. So two shots before you go on stage...
TP: Yeah, it totally settles me down, my tongue is looser, and then, if I'm kind of tense and then my voice gets weak, but if I have two shots in me, then I'm relaxed.

DA: Is it different, though? Because the numbers are way bigger than normal.
TP: Yeah, way bigger than we're used to, but we've played enough festivals – Metalfest and Hellfest, you kind of grow... We've been a band for over five and a half years now. At first, when we played Metalfest on a big stage, we were a mess, we didn't know what to do. We couldn't handle ourselves, we just were a mess. And from that point on, we like made a point to get better at playing the bigger stages in front of bigger crowds, and this tour has definitely helped us. We've improved considerably on this tour. Like, from day one of this tour, I thought the band was in a good place, but now, we're in a much better place with the performance level for this type of crowd. It all works out great 'cause we go back and play the small venues, that's where we're from, that's where the band's most comfortable, but it's really cool to play these venues, too.

"Believing in Jesus and believing he performed all these miracles... it would be better if you could see it, if you could see video, instead of just believing stories that are written in a book—that's tough 2000 years later.."

DA: You're doing them at the same time?
TP: Yeah, we're doing both.

DA: Oh, and what's great is that this is happening before your album comes out.
TP: Yes.

DA: That's huge.
TP: It's extremely huge for us, because we didn't expect to be on tour right now. We finished the record in mid-March and then we expected to have off until basically mid-May when we were going to do a short, like two week, secondary market run. That got cancelled, obviously, because this came up, and we couldn't believe it. It's different because we're from the underground scene to tour with bands like Drowning Pool that kids in the underground don't like. But, you know, the Drowning Pool fans like us. It's cool.

DA: Man, people are people no matter what style of music—
TP: Exactly, I mean it's heavy rock, you know? It's cool. We'll have fun with them.

DA: That's so good to hear. I look forward to seeing what happens. I really think that's about it, I could talk to you for hours and I appreciate you taking the time. I'm sorry our first time for the interview fell through.
TP: That's cool, and you're from what city?

DA: I was in Austin. Here in Texas.
TP: Oh, you were in Austin?

DA: Yeah, a family member had a stroke so I couldn't visit you.
TP: That's right. Oh, I'm sorry dude. Are they doing OK, or...?

DA: Yeah, everything's just... she's fine. She went through a daze and now she's OK.
TP: That's hard to see... but it's awesome that she's doing better.

✖

AMERICANS OF FAITH

BY DAVID STAGG

If up has its down, over has its under, and left has its right, it's only fair to adopt this last pair of antonyms' political connotations and personify them as Rock the Vote having its Americans of Faith. In the past, RTV has widely been known as the figurehead for non-partisan voter registration movements; however, it has also widely been known to speak "non-partisan" and "non-profit" while holding hands with the ACLU and MTV—hardly two groups that could be called liberally inactive. Americans of Faith, however, are here to play Hatfield to its left-leaning McCoy. Their clique's personal ad would look something like the antithesis of Rock the Vote's: "Any and all Christians and/or religious conservatives over 18 to participate every voting year." Despite this glaring philosophical contradiction to RTV, the two groups could also been seen as similar in one regard. They both only reach out to a specific group of people: one to conservatives and one to liberals. By law, this is OK; to remain a non-profit organization, you need be, as Jack St. Martin, executive director for Americans of Faith, describes his organization, "non-partisan and non-political. … Our goal is to register religious conservatives; how they vote is up to them." This means, essentially, that for any non-profit organization to remain as such, they're allowed to gather voters—but not permitted to tell them who to vote for. So while Rock the Vote is cavorting its hip image to every college campus in America (where they are farming a mainly liberal, idealistic college demographic), Americans of Faith are coming to a Sunday School near you. Here, St. Martin briefs us on what it means to be a part of the Americans of Faith movement, to support Christian and religious conservatives—and why you should vote this November.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS FOR AMERICANS OF FAITH?
Americans of Faith and Operation Vote (our voter registration initiative) has the short-term goal of registering two million new religious conservative and Christian voters. A longer-term goal of the organization is to encourage religious conservatives and Christians to be better citizens. We seek to have a profound impact on American society and culture. From government and entertainment, to the arts, education, and business, Americans of Faith seeks to make the voice of Evangelical Christians and religious conservatives heard, calling our members and supporters to be good citizens, reliable neighbors, wise consumers and stewards of our nation's blessings.

WHY SPECIFY THE CHRISTIAN FAITH?
We are not an exclusively Christian organization. Anyone who draws a basic conservative worldview on the issues of religious liberty, protecting human life, and the protecting traditional marriage from their faith is welcome. We are, however, a primarily Christian organization and are not ashamed to proclaim that openly.

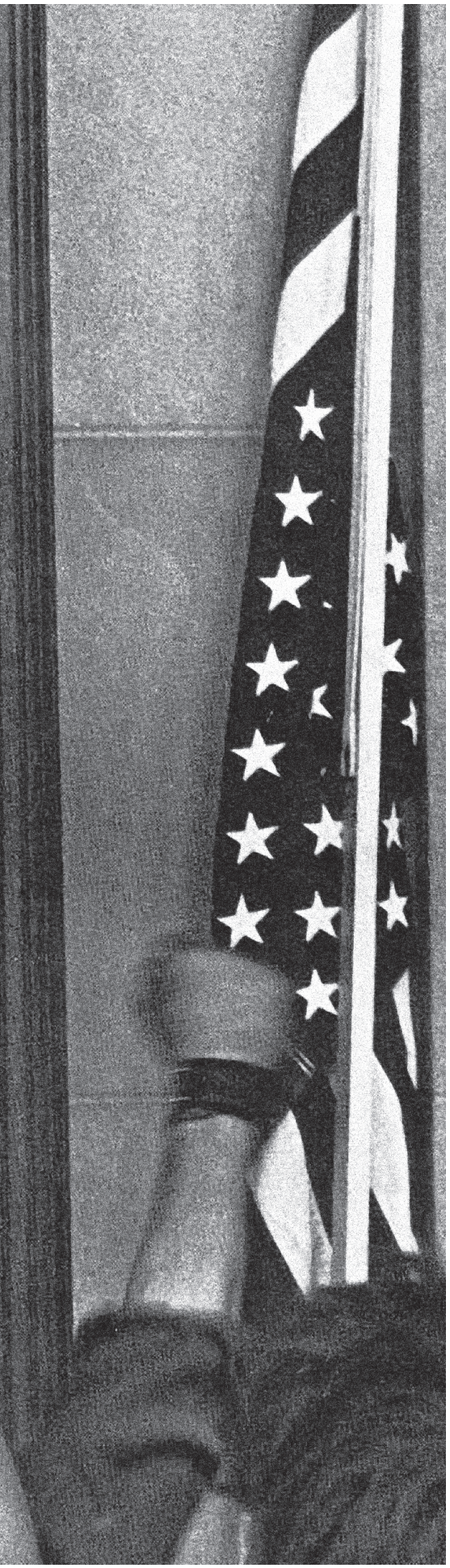
WHAT LED TO THIS IDEA?
A group of high profile evangelical leaders … recognized last year that there was a real need to identify, educate, organize, and mobilize religious conservatives. There was a feeling that not enough was being done to reach this important constituency.

DO YOU THINK THE ROCK THE VOTE ORGANIZATION IS MORE OR LESS A FRONT FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY?
More importantly, is it pushing a world-view that is often destructive for our country? And the answer to that is yes. Of course the hard edges are taken off most of the time, but this is an organization that embraces a great many things that we should be concerned about as Christians.

WHY DON'T CHRISTIANS VOTE?
I believe that many Christians think that it is too "worldly" to vote, that any involvement in politics is being "of" the world not just "in" it. I also believe that many Christians are frustrated that there have not been more meaningful victories for our causes. More than anything, however, I think Christians face the same pressures that more and more people face in our culture. We are not always able to get to a polling booth, but we should. … We not only have a right to vote, we have biblical mandate to be good citizens and to protect our nation's freedoms, if for no other reason than to guarantee that we will always be free to share the Gospel.

HOW DOES MUSIC AND YOUTH ENTER IN TO YOUR VISION AS AN ORGANIZATION?
If Christians and religious conservatives are going to make a difference in our country, then we have to recognize that any change we make needs to be permanent. That means we have to have a game plan for the next thirty years—not just the next five months. Young Christians are and will be the ones that really determine the ultimate success or failure of our efforts; to ignore them is to basically give up before we even started.
Music is such an integral part of every generation's identity. More than any other modern art form (with the possible exception of cinema), it inspires and motivates. … I can't imagine the body of Christ without music, and I can't imagine starting a group that seeks to motivate Christians without that same music.

WHAT STYLES OF MUSIC DO YOU SEE AS CENTRAL TO YOUR STATED GOALS?
All kinds. It is the message not the medium that is important. If we are going to be an organization that represents all Christians and religious conservatives then we need to embrace all of the various styles that reach those folks. It is particularly fun to challenge the secular view of the Body of Christ, with performers and music that are non-traditional, experimental, or just plain different.



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Album reviews

51 ALBUMS 58 ENTERTAINMENT 59 BOOKS & GEAR

Illustration by
D. Michael Allen

Rating system

05 CLASSIC
04 FABULOUS
03 SOLID
02 SUSPECT
01 AMISS

ZAO

THE FUNERAL OF GOD

A review by John Sant

There's a minor bit of irony in the fact that Zao has removed its famously troublesome element, spent a great deal of time (relatively) conceiving and writing "The Funeral of God," and hit 99% of their tour dates without a cancellation, but still the new album is flawed enough to be frustrating.

Zao has been and continues to be, even after this album, a mosh-band. Depending entirely on personal inclinations, this may or may not be a good thing. Every song element on the album only serves to set up two minute bumpers on both ends of the track. They exist to hold up the breakdown that constantly sits square in the middle. It seems as if the entire point of the song is that middle, or two-thirds mark. And if that mark is the moment the band unloads and gets heavy, does that mean they were holding out on us before that? Are they building tension? Oh, believe me, I get the concept of tension, and the need to build intensity, but the art and a delicacy is hard to come by. Where a band like Neurosis slowly bleeds into a build up, each Zao song more or less plows forward in uniform manner with no obvious effort to increase tension. It's the "verse/chorus, verse/chorus, bridge, chorus" format by the numbers, go into that "super heavy, man this is cool hook" and then exit to the chorus again, without nuance.

Here is the key, however, and you're going to have to choke down your fanboy anger to get it: the album is near perfect in terms of concept and execution of that concept. A great deal of credit goes to Dan for the lyrics he's penned and also to the band for the arrangement of the tracks. I may feel that the songs on their own are weak, but as a whole – as an album – they're seamless. The album carries the listener in such a vivid, linear fashion from God's departure to the personal and global effects of His absence that it's near theatrical in its execution. By the time you reach "Praise the War" machine, you're witness to a planet in complete disarray, and the following two songs, "Truly, truly, This is the End," and "I Lay Sleepless in My Grave," the devastation has become more visual than audible, which is a major credit to the band. ➡

It's frustrating that Zao did so well conceptually. If they're able to break out of the formulaic songwriting and continue to evolve as they have on this album, with Scott's raspy singing and Dan's continued brilliant performances, they'll be absolutely stunning. As it is now, they have restricted themselves by forcing the same formula on each of their songs. *The Funeral of God*, is certainly worth picking up, and has infinitely more replay value than *Parade of Chaos*. It's obvious with this album the band is moving toward great things. Negative aside, I do love listening to it—evident by the fact it hasn't left my playlist in a month and a half. .~~[FERRET RECORDS] JOHN SANT~~

LOST DOGS

MUTT

Mutt is an underground group of super strays. If you've ever seen the hilarious and poignant Lost Dogs live—depending perhaps on your age—it may strike you how much Taylor and Hindalong and the Seventy-Sevens' Mike Roe and the Choir's Derri Daugherty have more in common with the diverse pre-rock years of American entertainment—when singers were not necessarily songwriters—and a mix of electric comedy and heartfelt performance grounded in a wide variety of traditional music was not so utterly rare. This was an era in which the Carter family and many other clans would bend Swamp hymns with cornfield lamentations, but not leave out the wisecracks and the soft shoe. Entertainment wasn't ubiquitous then, and a surly attitude from a petulant 'six string bard' would be rewarded with neither a mystical reputation nor a hard-earned dollar. Thus, their album *Mutt* blatantly draws upon a period when artists would update and keep in circulation their previously much-loved songs. What this means is that my wife and I can sing along to yet another dazzling performance of "The Lust, the Flesh, the Eyes, & the Pride of Life," one of the most shocking and somehow comforting white blues songs that was ever jangled and crooned. It's all in how you look at it: These other nine songs are such gems—including a much-needed update of the apocalyptic "If You Want To," from DA's overlooked *Kalhoun* and the always-pleasing "Beautiful, Scandalous Night" from the tragically out-of-print *At The Foot Of The Cross*. A real gem can always be brought out again, spit on and scrubbed down, showed off for a new crowd, or for the delight of the people who always appreciate a sparkling tune. So where's the crime? If you've heard them before, you know you're going to want to hear these songs again. Now if there was someway to audio-merge these plaintively beautiful numbers with the superb comedy of the personalities who perform them live ... that would be even better! ~~[FOOLS OF THE WORLD] CHRIS ESTEY~~

CHRIS STAPLES

BLACKEST HAIR, BLUEST EYES

Chris Staples has really found his niche post-Twothirtyeight. *Blackest Hair, Bluest Eyes* is a solo, alt-country, rock compilation that was put together with tracks from former releases originally appearing on *Burned and Blistered*, a limited release on CD-R only, and *Panama*, also a limited-run release from mid-2001. There are two new tracks here, "Something to Break" and "American," both awesome, slower country musings whose lyrics really make you feel like you're inside Staples' head. That's the real glory in Chris Staples: His words are accessible and almost always allow you understand how he feels. These same feelings are once again conveyed on this record with solid musicianship behind him and are a good reason to look forward to a true new release, said to be ready by October. In the mean time, this CD is wonderful. ~~[MAKEBREAK] DAVID STAGG~~

BLOODLINED CALLIGRAPHY

THE BEGINNING OF THE END (EP)

Hopefully you've never heard of this band, because I want it to be my pleasure to introduce them to you. This is one of the best EPs I've heard in a long time. It's the way metalcore should be done: chaotic at parts, ridiculously fast in others, and a party to listen to all the way through. The first song (out of five) is a taste of what's to come, dropping ridiculous drumming and metal riffs. As the CD continues, things only get better and better. "Isaac is the Champ" has some of the best riffs I've heard in a while, moving flawlessly and precisely through the structure. And no matter how close you listen, you'll never even realize the singer's a girl. ~~[STRIKE FIRST] DAVID STAGG~~

UNDEROATH

THEY'RE ONLY CHASING SAFETY

The double life of Underoath. Before joining Solid State, it was straight up hard. Then with their Solid State debut, *The Changing of Times* (coincidental, huh?), melody was unleashed. Hardcore screaming remained, but the band was evolving toward something else. *They're Only Chasing Safety* takes yet another step away from metal and hardcore. While it has ups and downs, several songs approach greatness. "It's Dangerous Business Walking Out Your Front Door" is one of these highlights, with timely breakdowns and a haunting choir background at one point in the song. The final track, "Some Will Seek Forgiveness, Others Escape," sounds like Copeland momentarily took over the band, and then got electrocuted at the end of the song. I'd call it brilliance, but it is definitely new ground that may not be favored by the old school fans. Other than this genre shift, the only other complaint goes in the "bang for your buck" category. Just like *The Changing of Times*, Underoath's latest effort is slightly longer than a mere 35 minutes, with essentially only 9 songs (plus one 50-second instrumental). It goes down to the age-old quantity vs. quality debate, but at least with Underoath, the quality side isn't lacking. ~~[SOLID STATE] JAMES WETZ~~

HAWK NELSON

LETTERS TO THE PRESIDENT

As if the album cover photograph wasn't enough of a hint towards what genre of music rests on the CD, Hawk Nelson is a pop-punk band. For comparative purposes, throw in two cups of fellow-Canadians Simple Plan with a spoonful of label-mates FM Static, a dash of Sugarcult, and a pinch of Lit (if you can still remember them). With a blend of playful ("California") and serious lyrics ("36 Days") crooned out through Jason Dunn's solid vocals, *Letters to the President* proves to be a well-executed, well-produced label debut. Also impressive is the variety of hooky anthems side-by-side with ballads and tongue-twisting fast punk songs. Whenever you purposely try to resist and then begin singing along to a chorus, it's time to give some respect. "Right Here" and "First Time" got me doing just that. Despite using a familiar and over-used style, Hawk Nelson does it right. If somebody has to take Simple Plan's place as pop-punk radio darlings, it should be these guys. ~~[TOOTH & NAIL] JAMES WETZ~~

Editor's Ratings

	DV	DA
Zao *The Funeral Of God*	04	03*
Lost Dogs *Mutt*	04	02*
Chris Staples *Blackest Hair, Bluest Eyes*	02*	03
Bloodlined Calligraphy *The Beginning of the End*	03*	03
Underoath *They're Only Chasing Safety*	04	04
Hawk Nelson *Letters to the President*	03*	03
Mourning September *A Man Can Change His Stars*	03	02*
12 Stones *Potter's Field*	03	01
Hit The Deck *Look Alive*	03*	02*
Sam Phillips *A Boot and a Shoe*	03	04
Anam Cara *S/T*	04	03
Various Artists *Sacred Roots of the Blues*	03	03*
More Than Electric *S/T*	02*	02
Briertone *Confessions of the Wicked*	04	03
The Awakening *Darker Than Silence*	04	04

MOURNING SEPTEMBER

A MAN CAN CHANGE HIS STARS

Mourning September is good at what they do. The Tulsa, OK quartet's debut CD *A Man Can Change His Stars* has the witty, repeated phrases that get stuck in your head. It has the clever, well-written guitar lines. It has the multiple singers. But what it absolutely has to have is the ability to separate itself from every other band that they sound like—and though the CD is a solid genre-figurehead, the band's downfall is that it still needs to work harder to break away from its counterparts. "Every Dream" has a slick breakdown that's sure to move crowds at a live show. The CD's first single, "Glorietta," has that feel of an anthem that will have kids oohing along with the back-up vocalists. The CD doesn't fall short lyrically, but it's also what you'd expect from the genre of the band. Eight of 10 songs' lyrics could be read on lead singer Tony Chavez's online diary. The CD could have easily been written by another band in their genre, but that doesn't make it bad. It just needs a push in the right direction. ~~[FLOODGATE] DAVID STAGG~~

12 STONES

POTTER'S FIELD

The world of mainstream radio rock has its favorites. Is sounding like a combination of all of them and touring with half of them (3 Doors Down, Nickelback, Puddle of Mudd in one bill!) enough for 12 Stones to join their ranks? *Potter's Field* improves on their self-titled debut, with better-crafted songs, although there's no clear-cut single like "Broken" from the last album. But the glaring weakness of 12 Stones is—and always has been—the competition. Paul McCoy is an admirable vocalist when he's not reaching for the lower notes, but compare him to the vocalists from any of the other bands above. Now throw in more competition from bands like Three Days Grace, Seether, Chevelle and Finger Eleven (who they sound eerily similar to on "Far Away," "Lifeless," and "3 Leaf Loser"), and it's not hard to see why 12 Stones gets overlooked. While *Potter's Field* is by no means bad, it has been done before. If you liked their S/T, you'll like them again, and if you're not disturbed by the frequency of airplay that unoriginal songs get, then there's no reason to avoid 12 Stones. ~~[WIND-UP] JAMES WETZ~~

HIT THE DECK

LOOK ALIVE

Thinking too deeply (and too much) musically has ruined much of modern hardcore. Hit the Deck, however, has the remedy: They have authentically captured the reckless abandon, speed, attitude, grit, and feeling of the genre as if it was still in its infancy and didn't even know that it was "hardcore" and could care less if it was. Far from being a cheap novelty nostalgic act, Hit the Deck scores big with a collection of threadbare and desperate-sounding, relentless tracks. This record is the perfect antidote to the avalanche of the ever-increasing number of sound-alike hardcore bands that plague the scene these days. ~~[STRIKE FIRST] CHRIS FRANCZ~~

SAM PHILLIPS

A BOOT AND A SHOE

Sam Phillips grows the chamber pop of *Fan Dance* into a more conceptually fulsome realization of that sound on a boot and a shoe. Husband/producer T Bone Burnett retains the string quartet, minimal rock instrumentation and hushed vocal delivery (almost mumbly sometimes) from last time. He adds drums that sound to be coming from a parade in which Tom Waits would march, among few other elements. Conceptually, Phillips progresses, too, as *a boot...* forms a song cycle chronicling the dissolution of a romance begun on peculiar terms in the first place. As with the best of her post-Leslie Phillips work, she figures the Almighty into the details, if not calling on Him outright anywhere. It's a grown-up break-up album, subtle, melancholy and reflective, geared to the adult alt- and collegiate-radio listeners she's been cultivating. Those of us who remember her from back when can only wonder when she'll sing with a smile again and hope none of this reflects her relationship with Burnett. ~~[NONESUCH] JAMIE LEE RAKE~~

ANAM CARA

S/T

Anam Cara, the offspring of former Underoath guitarist Octavio Fernandez, accomplished what it set out to do with their music: bring a melody to metalcore. This four-song EP showcases heavy vocals—a scream not death or black metal, but more punk or hardcore—with solid lyricism from vocalist Ashton Goggans. The best part of this Florida quintet's release, however, is its musicianship. The guitars flow melodically, seamless in its mayhem to major key exchanges, vocals icing the top of the cake (but don't look for any singing here). Anam Cara goes from beautiful chords to ripping metal in seconds, doing so fluently. Some of the production quality could be bettered (occasionally the guitars sound like they were recorded poorly), but this doesn't take away from the record. Look forward to a diverse, yet satisfying, metal-emo hybrid—and a full-length release from these guys in the future. ~~[STRIKE FIRST] DAVID STAGG~~

VARIOUS ARTISTS

SACRED ROOTS OF THE BLUES

This is an incredible documentary of gospel, blues and soul. It's easy to find a good blues song to squint your face to, but finding a handful of these tracks—let alone 27 of them—is a rarity. Collected from past Victor Studios recordings, the songs span between 1902 and 1954. This isn't necessarily an easy listen, but it's one of important note. The history behind this is rich: From old gospel quartets to groups of women singing with every ounce of their being... This is an important glimpse into the beginnings of rock and roll. We've seen the clips of Elvis shaking, now listen to the shakes that inspired him to get up and spread it to the world. ~~[BLUEBIRD] DAVID ALLEN~~

MORE THAN ELECTRIC

S/T (EP)

Although only 3 songs deep, MTE's EP gives a fairly good idea of what the band is capable of: catchy, easy-to-digest rock songs with passionate vocals. The sampler is quite reminiscent of the sound Acceptance created in their Black Lines to Battlefields EP, with touches of vintage Third Eye Blind and some old school rock guitar solos. The purpose of releasing such a short disc is an obvious ploy to raise interest in their forthcoming full-length. Mission accomplished. ~~[MUSIC DOG] JAMES WETZ~~

BRIERTONE

CONFESSIONS OF THE WICKED

The second release from Briertone finds them drifting slightly away from their dark version of alt-country, and improving in the process. Present is the eclectic mixture of rock elements and unrock instruments (banjo and mandolin?), but the Lynyrd Skynyrd influence seems to lean toward contemporary rock artists. The result is an interesting 7 songs that leave the listener intrigued by the band's creativity. Their songs feature a plethora of unexpected notes, and picking out where a chorus is, or whether there is one to begin with, can be difficult. While this is not bad by any means (and is in fact quite pleasing), the sheer uniqueness can almost become a deterrent. Hopefully it won't be, because *Confessions of the Wicked* seems to get better with repeated listens and is one of the more impressive short CDs I've heard in awhile. ~~[SOMETHING SACRED] JAMES WETZ~~

THE AWAKENING

DARKER THAN SILENCE

While it's great to have many bands that don't take themselves too seriously, we also desperately need those that do take themselves and their craft very seriously. Anything dark and heavy like this kind of demands artistic attention. Not getting the sound or performance just right can really mess things up. Ashton Nyte and his South African band, The Awakening probably know how to have a good time and crack a good joke backstage, but once they step onstage (or in this case, the studio), things tend to get serious. Not missing a step from their *Roadside Heretics* or *The Fountain* sessions, The Awakening are as heavy and doomy as ever, impressive mostly for dipping into the same inkwell and yet managing to write something new. Recommended if you like: Manson, Type O, HIM. ~~[INTERVENTION ARTS] DOUG VAN PELT~~

CAPE RENEWAL

WATER COLOR

I've got to hand it to Cape Renewal for putting out one of the most original releases I've heard in awhile. *Water Color*, their second technical full-length (the band has littered compilations, put out EPs and has an out-of-print eight-song CD) is entirely eclectic, and though original, it takes its toll on the listener. Melodic self-described "mediumcore" bleeds into blabbering speak bleeds into a scream here and there; some of the lyricism borders on bad rap. But halfway through the record, the initial originality wears off. The group has been genre-billed as screamo or metal or rock, but they hardly seem to fall under these categories. If anything, *Water Color* is a very progressive, Cure-influenced, mewithoutYou lyrical stream of consciousness lightly peppered with screams and owns the phrase "going out on a limb;" however, the critical acclaim is going to come from being different—not from being outstanding. ~~[ANGRYSON] DAVID STAGG~~

ADIOS

THE ROPES

Fans of college radio should have no problem digesting these Akron, Ohio boys. Their debut album, *The Ropes*, is ten tracks of harmony-laden indie with a hard edge. Slow tempo abounds throughout, but there is enough guitar distortion to hint at shades of Sunny Day Real Estate, Noise Ratchet, and Further Seems Forever. Don't let their age fool you (they'll be the ones with big black X's marked on their hands at concerts): the sound Adios has created is well beyond their years. *The Ropes* sounds very reminiscent of Noise Ratchet's *Till We Have Faces*. On first listen, a lot of tracks on both respective albums have a similar feel, and it takes repeated listens for each song to begin taking their own identity. Once they do, look out. Adios is catchy enough (minus the pop music feel) to garner attention, especially if their future releases are budgeted for higher production levels.
~~[TRIBUNAL] JAMES WETZ~~

HANOVER SAINTS

BLOOD, GUTS AND GLORY

Hanover Saints is the new breed of punk rock—the breed you hear supporting a cast of professional skaters in a video game. If the soundtrack to the video game that inspired a thousand kids to skateboard (read: hurt themselves) is the most coveted spot in underground music, Hanover Saints' newest effort is worthy of a spot. The band—which has yet to be on any such soundtrack—definitely should be. At first listen, *Blood, Guts and Glory* may be every other anthem-filled, punk-dancing, fist-raised record, but listen to it enough—even as background music to your everyday life or while you're playing a video game—and you'll find yourself singing the hooks and before you know it, you're at their next show in town. ~~[STRIKE FIRST] DAVID STAGG~~

SUFFERING & THE HIDEOUS THIEVES

RATS IN HEAVEN

The only thing more exhausting than listening to *Rats in Heaven* is trying in vain to classify it in the context of other music. The broad range of instruments used, from standards like guitars and drums to the ones collecting dust in a storage shed (Irish flute and penny whistle!), doesn't even come close to the range of lyrical content. Singer Jeff Suffering is the indie version of Counting Crows front man Adam Duritz, painting pictures with exquisite storytelling and vocals that bleed with emotion. But with that explained, the real question is not whether the band is talented (they are), but simply, "Are the songs enjoyable?" To the casual listener, probably not. While some sound like drunken bar anthems from the 1800s ("There is a Fountain Filled With Blood"), others are just mentally taxing. "Souvenir" is over nine minutes long, and the version of "Amazing Grace" that ends the collection is 11-plus minutes! It takes an extremely open mind to recognize the unorthodox genius in this album. There is not one track that is fast-paced, and listening to it while driving is the equivalent of driving drunk. It is simply entrancing, haunting, creepy, terrible and beautiful. Confused yet? Try listening to it. It will be the most interesting 57 minutes of your day. ~~[LUJO] JAMES WETZ~~

IN PASSING

LOOK ALIVE

If you put Twothirtyeight (sans the emo) and Ben Folds (sans the piano) together, you'd have a good idea of what In Passing is like. And no, that's not a bad thing. Singer Wes Sumner's voice is soothing and geeky, but it accurately acts as a metaphor for the band's sound. The lyrics are also solid; on "New Freedom" Sumner reflects, "Maybe I'm an optimist / but this won't hurt a bit." On the first track he muses, "I know you love her / but I swear it's the fever." All in good time, In Passing has put together a well-sounding record, but more importantly, where this release lacks, the band shows promise of development to make them an outstanding artist. ~~[INDIANOLA] DAVID STAGG~~

JOEY'S LOSS

UNWELCOME TRAVELERS AND OTHER BRAVE MEN

In the Sep/Oct 2002 issue of HM Magazine, the indie-rock outfit Joey's Loss was chosen as one of the bands for the "Pick of the Litter." With the July release of their *Unwelcome Travelers* LP, the good news is that the band has remained true to its sound, pulling together a record that flows well. But as far as good news goes, it's hard to find more than that. The record's musicianship is above average, but the melody is impossible to find. The aforementioned HM called the "lead singer's still developing voice" as "promising," but on this release, it seems to have gotten lost. It's as if he picked a note and forgot to deviate higher or lower than a step—throughout the whole record. If the singer would shine, the record would improve by leaps and bounds. But as of now, tracks like number five are too painful to listen to. ~~[INDIE VISION] DAVID STAGG~~

THE PRISONERS DILEMMA

HANDSHAKES, HELLO AND GOODBYE

Expect to hear a lot about The Prisoners Dilemma—and for good reason. This Anaheim-based band has put together one of the most eclectic, melee attacks of a release and it begs to be heard. On the opening track "A Three Second Excerpt," the band traverses emo to metal to piano ballad in five minutes—and does it really, really well. The experimental and closing track to the record, "The Surrendering," sounds like it could be *Phantom of the Opera* interlude music or the soundtrack to a horror movie. The only downfall of the CD is that it's short. Give us more: It's wonderful listening to a CD where you have no idea what the band is going to throw at you next, and The Prisoners Dilemma does exactly this. ~~[INDIANOLA] DAVID STAGG~~

Editor's Ratings

	DV	DA
Cape Renewal *Water Color*	02*	02*
Hanover Saints *Blood, Guts and Glory*	03	03
Suffering & the Hideous... *Rats In Heaven*	02*	02*
In Passing *Look Alive*	03	03*
Joey's Loss *Unwelcome Travelers And Other Brave Men*	03	02
The Prisoners Dilemma *Handshakes, Hello and Goodbye*	04	03
Antestor *Det Tapte Liv*	04	03
Frosthardr *Makteslos*	03*	02
Royal Anguish *The Chronicles of Autumn Sorrow*	03	02
Consecrator *Image of Deception*	03	03
Tiles *Window Dressing*	03*	02
Sanctum *Let's Eat*	03	02
X-Nihilo *Not My Home*	03	02

ANTESTOR
DET TAPTE LIV

Over six years since the release of their masterpiece, *The Return of the Black Death*, one of the most dearly loved Christian black metal bands has finally come up for air with this breathtaking 19 minute EP titled, *Det Tapte Liv* (The Lost Life). The opener, "Rites of Death," is a blistering tune that will peal the paint off your walls with raging intensity. Occasionally, they will pause for a nice soft guitar piece and maybe a bell tolling in the background, but then they will rip right back into the brutal guitars, blasting, and horrifying black metal shrieking. However, of the five songs on this disc, only two would qualify as black metal songs. The other three are all mellow, yet very beautiful and haunting instrumentals. Ex-Vaakevandring Ronny Hansen takes over as the new vocalist and does nothing but impress. The drumming on this disc in incredible, but has already caused some controversy as the band hired Jan Alex Blomberg, (a.k.a. Hellhammer of Mayhem, Immortal, Kovenant, Arcturus, etc…) for this recording and for the recording of their upcoming full-length release. Production and packaging are superb! The first 1000 copies come in a limited edition black matte heavy paper box with a special heat-embossed black Antestor logo on top, designed to also house the upcoming full-length digipak that will be released later this year. This is a fabulous release that no black metal fan's collection should be without.
[END TIME] STEWART STEVENSON

FROSTHARDR
MAKTESLOS

Hailing from Norway, Frosthardr has released their second EP, *Maktesløs*. Where *Necrodisaster* was grounded in old school black metal, this release combines that old school sound with present influences of symphonic black, death, melodic, and thrash metal. The mix creates a fine disc of excellent extreme metal. The intro and outro to this album ("Maktesløs" and "Vandret") are both very cool, instrumental industrial tracks. The remaining three songs, "Koma," "Death-My Relief," and "Ravneskrik" are all very strong black metal songs that range from slow and plodding, to scorching black metal with furious blasting. The black vocals are just plain sick throughout, but the band throws in death growls, and some clean singing/chanting to keep you on your toes. The production and artwork are also very nicely done, making this a very impressive sophomore album from this talented band. If not at your local store, try either Blastbeats or Nordic Mission.
[MOMENTUM SCANDINAVIA] STEWART STEVENSON

ROYAL ANGUISH
THE CHRONICLES OF AUTUMN SORROW

Originally recorded back in the mid-'90s but never released, Bombworks Records has done all metal lovers a favor and has made this killer album available for the first time. Royal Anguish fans will see some of the band's hybrid metal beginnings here, but this album mostly stays in the realm of thrash and old school death. Aggressive and harsh, this disc contains 13 songs of high-quality metal that don't sound as dated as one would think. This should hold Royal Anguish fans over for now as they currently record their follow-up to *Mysterion*.
[BOMBWORKS] STEWART STEVENSON

CONSECRATOR
IMAGE OF DECEPTION

Remember Believer? I'm sure you do. Well, if you were crazy about Believer, you should definitely pick this disc up. Bombworks Records has re-released the old Consecrator demos and this is some absolutely killer thrash that will have you convinced that it was actually Believer recording under a different name. How this band never got signed to a huge label is beyond me. Fantastic stuff!
[BOMBWORKS] MATT MORROW

TILES
WINDOW DRESSING

This marks Tiles' fourth studio album. This special edition comes with a bonus live CD that is a bootleg concert when they were supporting Dream Theater a few years back. The sound quality is actually pretty decent on the live disc, and it gives those who aren't familiar with Tiles a peek into their music before this new disc. *Window Dressing* was mixed by Terry Brown (Rush, Cutting Crew, Fates Warning), and you can definitely hear the Rush influence (and a lil Dream Theater and King's X). Overall, Tiles play a great blend of progressive rock with some hard rock tendencies (not to mention that these guys are fabulous musicians). The album opens with the long, 17-minute title track. The song is very good, but it has a few lulls that make me itchy to hit the skip button. I guess it's the progressive metalhead in me that finds it hard to swallow all the slow meandering that progressive rock bands tend to get into. The song goes through many changes along the way and actually grows on you after numerous listens. They often switch from hard rock to soft acoustic with long instrumental passages. The lyrics are excellent on this song. It basically speaks about how what we see is not always actually true reality. "Faces I see/Tell little about/What to believe/Layers of window dressing/Barely hint at what's beneath/Covered up like paint on rust/Who to trust?" This entire album is very impressive lyrically. Not just because of the topics they address, but the beautiful and poetic way that they address them. They are worth reading even if you don't enjoy this style of music. Picking best songs is tough, but I'd have to go with the band's more aggressive stuff. Songs like "Paintings," "Spindrift," and "Capture the Flag" are all excellent. The haunting and somber "Slippers in the Snow" also begs for a vote. Honestly, there are no bad songs on this album. The design and artwork for the album was done by Hugh Syme (Aerosmith, Rush, Megadeth). The packaging is wonderful and very high quality. My only complaint would be that the front cover has a little kid looking in the window of a clothing store, only to see a women putting on a pair of shorts with only her undergarments on. And on the inside cover that same women is taking off her shirt with part of her bra showing. I understand the concept behind window dressing, but I could've done without the risqué photos. Overall though, this band has made me an instant fan. I've never cared for progressive rock too much, but I think I'll stop and take a closer listen in the future. This is definitely not an album to casually listen to once and form an opinion. It takes multiple, open-minded listens to let it sink in. The reward for your patience is an album that you'll be going back to often. [INSIDE OUT] MATT MORROW

SANCTUM
LET'S EAT

With my first bite into Sanctum's *Let's Eat*, I wasn't sure what to think. Losing their captivating female vocalist, Lena, was a big shock. The result is an album that, while bearing obvious Sanctum signatures, is a very different listen compared to the band's past work. Formerly beautiful and moving mixed with the harsh and haunting, this new material is more raw and powerful. The haunting aspect is still there, but this music seems to be more twisted and inaccessible. It's comparable to having your head plunged under water, and just when panic begins to set in, you're yanked above the surface for only a few brief seconds of oxygen before being forced under again. Despite the differences, this album is pure genius. Sanctum has carefully crafted an incredible masterpiece that should have industrial fans in a frenzy. They have created a world of industrial noise and rough beats, soft and delicate piano, soothing violin, and an array of other creative and attention grabbing sounds put together in a way that is nothing short of brilliant.
[COLD MEAT INDUSTRY] STEWART STEVENSON

X-NIHILO
NOT MY HOME

Hailing from Texas, X-Nihilo is the newest band on Bombworks Records. Imagine a combination of some of the harder "core" bands on Solid State and then throw in some .rod laver or early Spoken and you're zeroing in on the X-Nihilo sound. It's heavy, aggressive rapcore with vocals that range from blood curdling screams to rapping to clean singing. Very nice packaging, good production, and Christ-centered lyrics round out a solid effort by these three guys and a gal. The style is not exactly my cup of tea, but rapcore fans would do very well to check this band out. [BOMBWORKS] MATT MORROW

JOY ELECTRIC
HELLO, MANNEQUIN

It's crazy how Christendom has had Joy Electric as its own electro-pop secret all these years. Crazier still how Ronnie Martin's one-man band defies the presupposed conventions of its genre by getting more textually and texturally nuanced with time. Not coincidentally, JE's latest (and last in a trilogy) *Hello, Mannequin*, trades in synthetically rendered impressions of time's ravages on relationships. If Martin isn't disillusioned with God, he sounds sad over how some of His human creation have wronged him. This malaise happily makes for some of JE's hookiest numbers in years, from mining a Gary Numan influence ("Who Are Friends?") to employing the name of an unheralded inventor as a metaphor for neglected friendship ("Nickola Tesla"). And if "Post Calendar" is another slice of some of the best hi-NRG, Eurodisco, homosexual club patrons may never hear, "I Am A Pioneer" brings just enough ego to assert Martin's place as a trailblazer of reinvented analog electronic music. Throughout, Martin's debt to musical mentors such as Numan, John Foxx-era Ultravox and Orchestral Maneuvers in the Dark may be made plainer than ever just as, paradoxically enough, his own creativity emerges more singularly. Shame that Martin (apparently) had to work through some mess for *Hello, Mannequin* 's inspiration, but the redeemed melancholy of his catharsis makes for compelling artistry. ~~[TOOTH & NAIL] JAMIE LEE RAKE~~

FURTHER SEEMS FOREVER
HIDE NOTHING

Jon Bunch can do no wrong. During his 13-year tenure as frontman of the seminal rock act Sense Field, his lyrics were always overwhelmingly hopeful, even when he sang of dire times; his voice—at times like that of a far more seasoned and rangy Scott Stapp—always seemed to give the listener a light at the end of the tunnel. And while Bunch carries over all these qualities to his debut with Further Seems Forever, it's obvious that he and the rest of the band (which already had the entire album recorded sans vocals when he joined) were on two different pages during the making of this album. While the songs themselves seem light years ahead of *How To Start A Fire*—heading in sort of progressive post-emo direction as opposed to more emo/hardcore-ish territory—Bunch seems a bit lost trying to navigate through the band's often dull, if non-existent hooks. The band's previous singers seemed rather comfortable with the rather hookless approach, but Bunch is a true frontman—trained in taking in the listener slowly and then, as the hook comes, wholly consuming them with his live-sized vocals—and on many occasions during this 10-song affair, he has no true place to do that and seems to scramble to be a singer he's not. That said, on the track's opener, "Light Up Ahead," the band wisely allows just the right elements of Sense Field's classic "Building" release to seep into the mix, in turn creating what is far and away FSF's best (and most accessible and radio-ready) song to date. While *Hide Nothing* is far from a flawless album, it is FSF's finest hour to date, and it shows a band that could truly take the world by storm if it hangs on to a vocalist (particularly the outstanding Jon Bunch) for more than one album. ~~[TOOTH & NAIL] ERIC W. ALEXY~~

ISAIAH OWENS
YOU WITHOUT SIN CAST THE FIRST STONE

Thanks to archival recovery of music by cool, raw, sincere artists such as singer/guitarist Isaiah Owens, pre-Edwin Hawkins soul gospel may well be the new vogue of American roots music. If the Lord comes along in a bargain that lets an electrified strummer and lets this howling singer catch recognition beyond the AM station in Montgomery where some of *You Without Sin Cast The First Stone* was recorded, let the adulation begin. Trad' Gospel diehards will swoon over the way he transforms the usually peppy "I'll Fly Away" and "Yes Jesus Loves Me" into aches for death's intimate communion with the Almighty. White Stripes and Black Keys lovers should fall for the minimalism (no drums, occasional claps) of Owens' brusque chording and cathartic vocal delivery. The ethno-musicological minded can rejoice over the preservation of sacred music with the same folkloric value and artistic vigor as Arhoolie Records' sacred steel and prison spiritual CDs. Owens makes gospel as primal (scream) therapy. Put down that Robert Randolph album a second and say "Wow!"
~~[CASE QUARTER] JAMIE LEE RAKE~~

THE SPIRIT THAT GUIDES US
THE SAND, THE BARRIER

In the name game that is music labeling, the buzzword "emo" get thrown around loosely. It's an abbreviated form of "emotion." If emo were ever used in the right context, The Spirit That Guides Us would should define the title. *The Sand, The Barrier* (their debut LP reissued from 2001) is a dive into deep, spiritually relevant lyrics and vocals (think Jeremy Enigk) that are aching with every syllable. One of the beautiful things about this album is its diversity. Two tracks feature poetic spoken-word set atop dark soundscapes, two tracks are slow ballads, the rest are driving and hard (although not necessarily of the fast tempo variety), and throughout there is the presence of screamo backup vocals and an overall feeling of intensity and Radioheadish creativity. The album flows in and out of tracks seamlessly, with some nice intricacies. For instance, a spoken poem from track nine flows into the next, so that when track 10 ("When My Eyes Receive Light") is played by itself, it begins with the end words of the poem: "The Spirit is inside us." Somehow, this European import has yet to receive much popularity or press in the States, but if true "emo" ever stood a chance, these guys are a shoe-in. ~~[GOODFELLOW] JAMES WETZ~~

TEN-33
EMERGENCY! EMERGENCY!

Listen to Ten-33's *Emergency! Emergency!* without looking at the CD player and you'll swear the first four tracks are one song. They're short, to the point, and sound alike—but are solid pieces of hardcore regalia that continue on through all of the tracks on the album. The record is more of a throwback to older hardcore styles, sounding equal parts punk and heavy, drawing on a myriad of influences to hash out 13 tracks and a secret song. There isn't much new here that deviates the band from any other hardcore outfit (the fist-pumping anthems, fast beats, lyrical themes of unity and not backing down), but the record is enjoyable to listen to; it's a fun record and will definitely be a hit live. The standout track here is "Black Manhattan," where the band shows commanding control of song structure and guitar melody so that the listener detects the subtle changes a hardcore record needs to rise above. Ten-33 has it in them—as this song shows—and if their other tracks maintained this songwriting, the record would be great. ~~[BLOOD AND INK] DAVID STAGG~~

Editor's Ratings

	DV	DA
Joy Electric *Hello, Mannequin*	03	03*
Further Seems Forever *Hide Nothing*	03*	04
Isaiah Owens *You Without Sin Cast The First Stone*	02*	03*
The Spirit That Guides Us *The Sand, The Barrier*	04	03
Ten-33 *Emergency! Emergency!*	04	03

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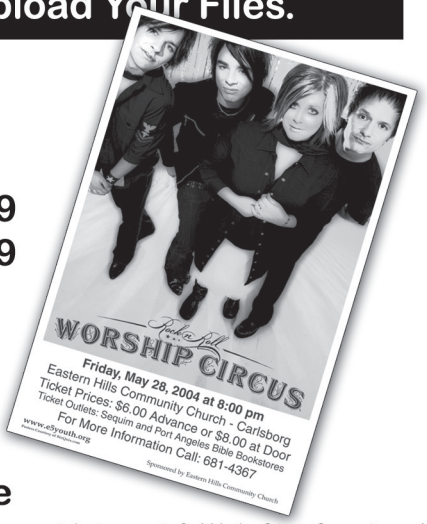
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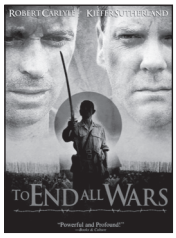
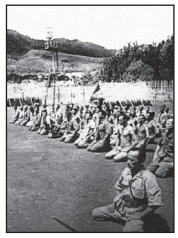




01 TO END ALL WARS
FOX VIDEO

"Greater love hath no man, than he that would lay down his life for his friends."

Such a sacrificial act is so moving and powerful that it about explains the Gospel (the story of God's redemption of man) in one act. This concept is explored within the context of the suffering and cruelty of a Japanese prisoner of war camp in WWII. An up-close look is given at the warring hearts and torn emotions between justice and mercy, vengeance and forgiveness. The words of Jesus are wrestled with on the big screen. This is found and experienced after investing two hours into this movie, however. It starts off rather bleak. A dear friend gave up on it when viewing the picture with me, wondering why a story this hopeless was worth watching. Like any narrative about redemption, though, sometimes it must get dark before the light breaks through. This is one of those rare movies that has successfully crystallized redemption and forgiveness – without packaging it in a sanitized or convenient form. Much like real life, the movie doesn't end at the moment of the messiah-like sacrifice, but continues on with the struggle. Amazing. DOUG VAN PELT

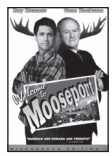
02 PAYCHECK *PARAMOUNT*
This fantastic thriller is eerily similar to *Minority Report*, offering plenty of ethical debate along with the suspense of the story. Food for thought line: "When you show someone their future, they have no future…you take away their hope." Discuss. All the extra features are outfitted with subtitles. Bravo!

03 50 FIRST DATES *COLUMBIA TRISTAR*
Now this is a romantic comedy. Love is expressed profoundly with Henry Roth's (Adam Sandler) redemptive turn from uncaring playboy to selfless giver to Lucy (Drew Barrymore), who cannot retain short-term memory, thus the premise of repeated first dates. Extra features score big with added laughs.

04 MASTER & COMMANDER *FOX VIDEO*
This epic tale of Captain Jack Aubrey is visually and audibly stunning. The exquisite packaging (with a map of the journey and detailed program) makes for quite a collector's boxset. Extras aplenty profile the adventurous sea life, with deleted scenes and featurettes, adding depth to multiple viewings.

05 PLAYMAKERS *BUENA VISTA*
Too controversial for the NFL (due to the seedy underbelly it fictitiously expresses), this show is compelling, football-realistic, and very rough on the language and sexuality. Like *Band of Brothers*, viewing this is a male-bonding experience about males bonding. It leaves you wishing for more episodes.

06 GOSPEL OF JOHN *VISUAL BIBLE*
If you'd enjoy a verse-by-verse concept, first brought to screen in *Matthew* by the Visual Bible people, then you're likely to appreciate the attention to detail in this most rich, spiritual, personal, and confrontational account of Jesus' life. Extra interviews were a plus, but the pop-up info wasn't.



07 WELCOME TO MOOSEPORT *FOX VIDEO*
Lives up to the billing of laughs. A few moments might make a few people squirm – like the dog mating scene and maybe the old man streaking – but overall it's pretty clean fun. The commentary details a movie mistake. Nice. Rent it.

08 BUBBA HO-TEP *MGM HOME ENT.*
This "redemptive Elvis mummy movie" proves that small indie films can be funny. Elvis and JFK become heroes in an old rest home that's haunted by a dead Egyptian body. The DVD is loaded with extras, befitting a cult classic. The audio commentary by "the King" is hilarious.

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08
SPIRITUAL RELEVANCY (%)	100	20	25	30	30	100	30	10
OBSCENITIES	26	8	20	2	238		8	50
GORE	1			4	1			1
NUDITY / SEXUALITY	1				15			1

FLOWBOARD
FLOWLAB

This snowboard-influenced deck on 14 wheels is an amazing and fun ride. With our first opportunity we took the board out for some carving, slides, rock and rolls, kickturns, ollies, even kick-flips (the last two of which were slightly more difficult due to the board's higher than normal weight). This unit's specialty is the carve – as one can imagine just by looking at this beast (anyone who owns one is guaranteed to get stares and "let me ride it" requests). Sharp turns are so tight your toes will drag. Smooth, wide carves are achieved by the patented "Deep Carve System," which puts 7 wheels on a curved axle, separated by spacers. Any turning puts the rider on a new set of wheels, as opposed to trucks angling with weight absorbed by bushings. Flowlab achieved its goal: creating a board to replicate the surfing and snowboarding experience.
While the boards haven't taken over contest riding, save for their own Flowfest ('03), Flowlab has successfully carved out its own niche/genre. With a retail price of $159, it's a wonderful toy. [flowlab.com]

NOMAD JUKEBOX ZEN
CREATIVE LAB

This sporty player is slightly bigger than a deck of cards (and weighs a lot more), but holds 30 gigs. Computer installation was effortless, but I had trouble loading it on more than one computer (anything older than XP seems to trip it up). Importing, ripping, and organizing songs was as simple as drag and drop with the Creative Media Organizer. Downloading song information is just as easy. With menu presets by artist name, genre, or album title, playing songs takes little time to get used to. And the audio sounds great, benefiting from the EAX settings, which include "smart volume," software that can match the levels from song to song – especially effective when coming from different sources. In addition to holding a huge archive of music, any digital file can be stored on it as well. I'm hooked. [nomadworld.com]

THE ROCK CRIES OUT
BY STEVE STOCKMAN
DAVE STAGG

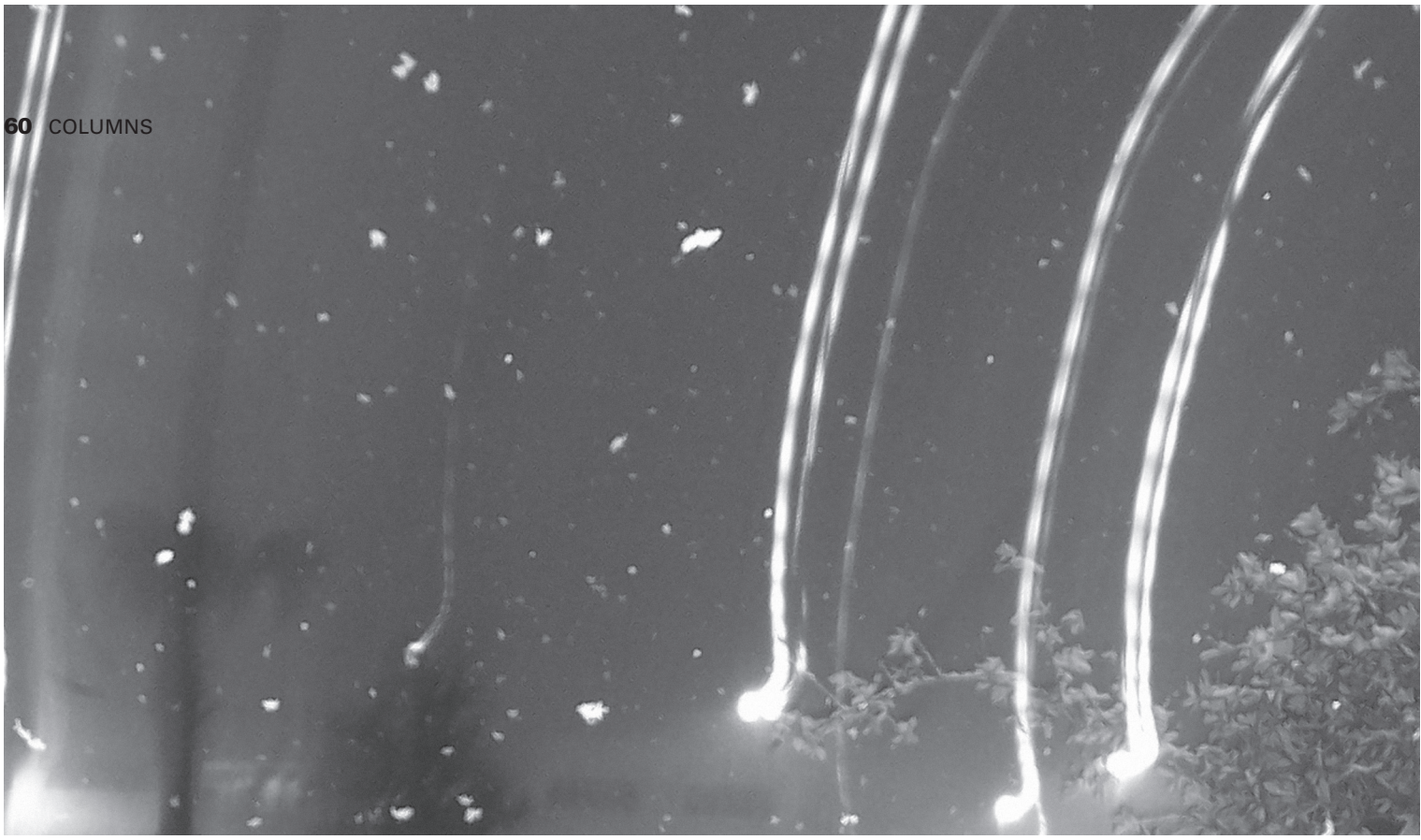
Steve Stockman's second book, "The Rock Cries Out" (he's also published six poetry books and *Walk On: The Spiritual Journey of U2*) attempts to find, as the book's jacket says, "truth where it doesn't belong." It's ironic that he says this—as if there is no place for truth outside of a Christian market—when in interviews, he says, "As Christians, we should not be so arrogant to think that we have a monopoly on truth…"

I would believe that Stockman, also a BBC radio host, believes the latter of the two—that truth can be found anywhere—despite the contradiction, but fails to establish credibility with readers. Stockman does hit on some very interesting points (like Radiohead being a wake-up call to the problems of the post Gen-Xers, rather than a group posing solutions to them) in his findings, but overall, the "truth" that Stockman reveals turns out to read more like a mini-spiritual biography of each artist, and moreover, represent some of Stockman's personal beliefs about the world in general.

It's this that bothers me most about Stockman; in some of his chapters he takes some very trendy political swipes at America. (Just for the record, Stockman is from Belfast, N. Ireland.) In his section on Radiohead, he discusses the album's "Hail to the Thief" moniker, calling the election that influenced the title "the most laughed at (outside of the U.S.A.!)" and going out of his way to describe it as what "brought George W. Bush to power and set us on the road to war in Iraq." No, Bush wasn't elected, he was brought to power. And after all, I guess that's all Bush did as President anyway: lead us to war with Iraq. Whether you believe this or not, it's an immature argument, thrown in without corroboration.

Stockman also sidesteps the generation at which he seems to be aiming. Ironic as it is, in trying to be relevant (the publisher is Relevant Books), he misses the mark. With the exception of Radiohead and possibly Kurt Cobain and Lauryn Hill, he picks artists that were cutting edge when *he* was growing up. George Harrison, Jackson Browne, Joni Mitchell, Tom Waits … these are all artists that once had their time in the spotlight. Of course "truth" can be found in their lives, but a child of the new generation may know nothing about their respective music—and worse, know nothing about the artists themselves. Stockman seems to dwell on the artists as people more, which is fine, as it is what inspired their music. But how refreshing it was to read about Radiohead—not only did I know their music, but I've watched the band grow up on MTV; I experienced the struggles they went through. It's *that* generation with which Stockman is dealing. It's also that generation Stockman alienates by not including *their* artists. Stockman's choices represent the points he wants to make; readers of a more current generation lose interest very quickly.

Personal opinion is one thing, but veiling politics and personal belief in Christian truth is another. Take the book for what it is: A humanistic plea for a better world, using artists who seem to represent Stockman's own beliefs—and not necessarily every Christians'.



When someone talks about Christianity and art, do you hear a subtle message between the lines that says, "If it's used to clearly glorify God or evangelize to a lost world, then it's good art. Then it is redeemed." This insinuation is out there. It could be described as "utilitarian." This means it only has value if it can be "used" for a certain purpose. If you go into a Christian bookstore, you will find some so-called "Christian art," such as a beautiful eagle and the verse from Isaiah 40:31 written in calligraphy underneath. This is art, and it certainly has a Christian message, but is it all that God intended for art? A simple overview of art in the Bible will probably yield a different vision for the arts than this narrow but commercially popular example.

One reason for the narrow view of "Christian art" is that the role of artist has been relegated to that of "hobby" or non-essential and frivolous occupation. In Genesis 4 (v20-22) are listed three sons of Lamech: Jabal ("the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock"), Jubal ("the father of all who play the harp and flute"), and Tubal-Cain ("who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron"). Out of the first three vocations mentioned in the Word of God, musician is listed right alongside these other honorable professions. How could man have missed this perspective? One culprit, perhaps, was the "romantic period" (1820-1900), where the artisan (a valid and hard working vocation) was elevated to the status of "artist" (say it like a Frenchman: "R-teeest"). The long-standing tradition of apprenticeship and learning a craft was pushed aside as gaze turned to the possible outcome of being elevated to a nobler class of "celebrity." While passion and excess have their own built-in punishment and sorrowful reaping, it also trains a public to relegate art to a small and insignificant portion of life. It became easy to view "entertainment" and "recreation" as things only for the rich and famous.

When God commissioned Moses to built a tabernacle, He was very specific about lampstands with flower-like cups; and an "atonement cover" with hammered gold cherubim with wings spread upward and overshadowing the piece. The finest artisans were chosen to make these intricate pieces. While being "chosen" and "commissioned" don't sound very romantic or rewarding actions, see if this description of how it went down changes your perspective:

"See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given skill to all the craftsman to make everything I have commanded you: the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony with the atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the tent – the table and its articles, the pure gold lampstand and all its accessories, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the basin with its stand – and also the woven garments, both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests, and the anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place."
(Exodus 31:2-11)

That's a pretty good recommendation – to have God Himself choose you for a special job. Being filled with the Holy Spirit over a thousand years before the Day of Pentecost is no small thing, either. But don't make the mistake of "spooking out" this act of God. Just because Bezalel was filled with the Spirit does not mean that his work wasn't hard, that it didn't stretch him and his abilities and push him beyond his known limits. Working with the Lord's blessing is surely more pleasant than working without it, but don't call it "easy" and don't forget it's work. But it is good work. (DV)

The way I see it
Chris Wighaman

I was recently in Romania on a mission trip. I've been on many, many mission trips and this was very much the same as the others.

However, there was this fantastic, yet frightening, moment when we encountered mentally handicapped children at a neighborhood orphanage. It was frightening because there was absolutely nothing attractive about them: they smelled, were mentally challenged, couldn't talk, couldn't play, and most were physically deformed. The children reached out to us pleading to be picked up… to be held for just a moment. Some in our group were genuinely scared and wanted to run away, while others of us held our breath and picked them up. It's hard to explain, but the image is haunting. When we finally got to a place where we could talk, I asked, "Why is it important that we are here?" My question was met with many responses, but the one I liked most was, "Because no one else will come." Christ said, "whatever you've done to the least of these…". Let me say just that there is nothing attractive about "the least." We may have nothing to gain from helping them, and they may have nothing to offer in thanks. Yet, it is our call.

"Whatever you have done to the least of these, you have done to Me," were the words of Jesus. Not the convenient. Not the popular. Not the clean. Not the good people. Jesus calls us to the least.

It is so very rare that we even encounter them. I, like most everyone, avoid them. I think of the people who work for La 'Arche and Mother Theresa and I feel ashamed. Why is it they can sacrifice and give up their 'normal' lives to helping, or just holding, those in need and I have trouble just once a year on a mission trip? The scary thing is, I am not alone. I know it. I'm not trying to spread the blame, but I wish we could all look at the life of Jesus and take note of the people He found it important to spend time. Reaching out to the least, if even to hold them for just a moment, is not unlike what God does for us when we come to Him. It may never make sense for us to reach out to the needy, but it likewise makes little sense that God would reach out to us.

What seems to be unnatural from the perspective of the world become natural for the follower of Christ. Just as in Christ's compassion God's nature becomes evident, so for those who want to proclaim God's presence in the world, compassion becomes a natural response. (Henri Nouwen, Compassion)

Devotions
with Greg Tucker

The story is told of Wayne Wesley, a wise investor who owned a string of successful McDonald's restaurants, making him wealthy beyond description. But even rich folks enjoy the simple things, and Mr. Wesley's greatest joy was doing things with – and for – his 6 year-old granddaughter Marie. That's what brought them to McDonald's one day for lunch.

Like any customer, Wayne stood in line and waited patiently as his tiny companion squirmed with anticipation. She made just one request: French fries. "Please, Grandpa, can I *please* have some French fries?" The man lived to bring her joy, and he smiled to himself when he purchased not one, but *two* Super-sized fries. "Just dump them together on the tray," he said. "We're going to eat these together."

But back at the table, Mr. Wesley's heart sank when Marie wrapped her arms around the tray, denying his request for food. Her actions said it all. "This is mine."

God has blessed us all, hasn't he? Provided us with homes, clothes, musical or artistic talent, gadgets, and jobs. We may want more than we have now, but the bottom line is simple: we're blessed.

Yet the Blesser's heart breaks when I refuse to share with him even a portion of what I have. When I wrap my arms around what's mine, I suspect there are three things he wants to lovingly say.

"First, I don't really need your fries. I could buy my own, but I wanted us to enjoy them together."

"Second, you need to know I'm the one who gave you those fries in the first place. It was easy. I own the restaurant."

"And third, if give me some fries and subsequently run out, I'll just give you more. (Long pause.) A *lot* more."

It's the principle found in Malachi 3:10, where God says "Trust me in this and just see if I don't open the floodgate of blessing on your life." Sounds like a good deal, doesn't it?

So what has God brought to the table in your life? Eat up, my friend, and enjoy! …But don't forget to share.

PICK OF THE LITTER

Silence The Foe

From the short, sweet synth intro to the screams and screwed ending, Silence the Foe is hands down one of the best hardcore outfits to board a ship and take the States by storm. From the first note of this five-song EP, the Norwegian six-piece will barely give you a chance to breathe—and you'll love every second you're underwater. Through the musicianship, reminiscent of mewithoutYou—or some form of the post-hardcore, garage sound at times, sprinkled with hints of Refused (which leads me to not want to call them hardcore, exclusively)—the entire record shines. Please pick this EP up; you'll thank yourself.

[silencethefoe.com] // David Stagg

Overhang

Having already won a contest this year that gave them rights to a main stage performance at Cornerstone in Illinois, Overhang's future looks promising. Their sound has elements of classic rock, yet is innovative enough to sound completely new and original. With songs that keep you guessing as to where they'll go next, Overhang is a refreshing reminder that old can sound new.

[overhangonline.com] // James Wetz

In The Face of War

In The Face of War is a throwback to old school hard-core and punk veiled as a modern screamo band. They'd fit the mold, but they don't let up for singing nearly as often as what most are used to (which is to be hailed). It's this that's part of their charm: they're relentless and chaotic, finishing off four tracks in just over seven minutes, each one as assailant as the next. Don't expect them to stop or let up.

[inthefaceofwar.com] // DS

The Myriad

If you're a fan of Muse/Radiohead/U2, there's a good chance that The Myriad could be for you. Singer Jeremy Edwardson's silky-smooth vocals are of standout quality to say the least, and the five-piece band writes flat-out interesting songs with a multitude of atmospheric layers and sound textures. And unlike some indie artists, these guys seem to have enough cash to provide high production values, as their latest 4-song EP sounds very polished.

[themyriad.net] // JW

Red Red

Red Red is what happened when The Agony Scene met up with Norma Jean and had dinner. The band, formerly Torn in Two of Facedown Records, we believe, should again be picked up. This 3-song EP of exquisite and chaotic metal-core is ridiculously promising and gives any listener a reason to look forward to future work from these five guys.

[redredmusic.com] DS

Aletheian

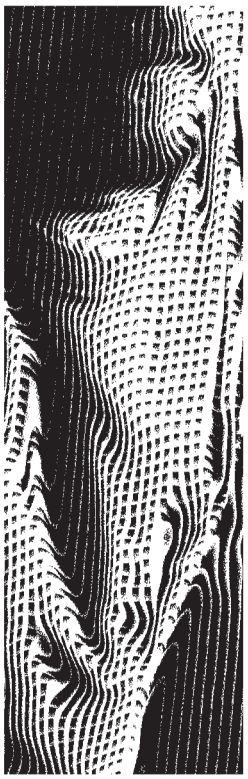
On first listen, Aletheian reminds me of what it would sound like if the now defunct DigHayZoose were to come back as a death metal band. That deranged and whacked-out influence is really heard here. The songs on *Apolutrosis* are all over the place. From ambient, to lethal death metal, to soft acoustic, to plodding heaviness, to meandering guitar solos, to gothic choirs, to Gregorian chanting, to soothing piano, to blast-beats, to funky bass solos, to just plain pummeling, chaotic, bone rattling brutality. Vocally, the band goes from deathly growls, to demented clean vocals, to whispered vocals, to high-pitched wailing; there's never a dull moment and they're never predictable. This release is a must for anyone tired of the same old nicely boxed-in bands. Aletheian has dared to step out on a limb with this technical and progressive slab of metal, and their execution was masterful.

[aletheian.com] // Matt Morrow

Radial Angel

Sometimes a band doesn't belong here. Radial Angel, for instance - they were a "Pick of the Litter" years ago before they were signed. But sometimes labels shake things up, lay employees off and drop bands. Thus Radial Angel is no longer on Squint Records (which doesn't seem to exist anymore in the Word Distribution system). Now this Bush-clone (the band, not the presidential candidate) is making music again like it mattered - as if the listener needed to feel what they feel. In a crowded world of modern rock radio (Staind, Nickelback, Kutless), this band won't win fans amongst the indie rock snobs that projectile vomit at the mention of said bands, but Jared Taber and company still manage to rock clean and hard.

[radialangel.com] // Doug Van Pelt



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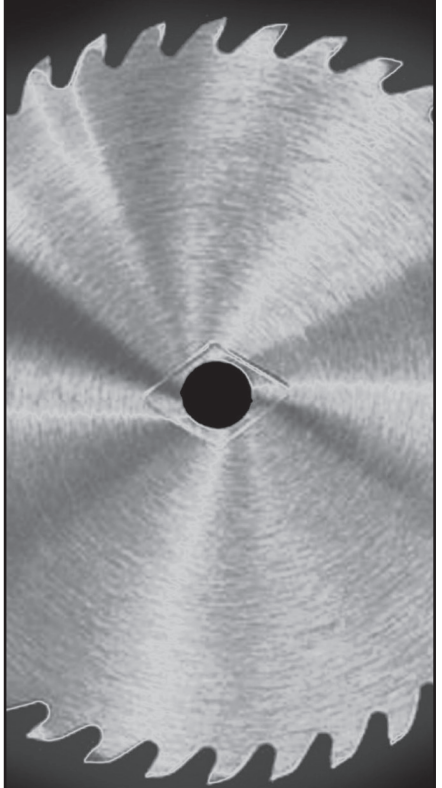

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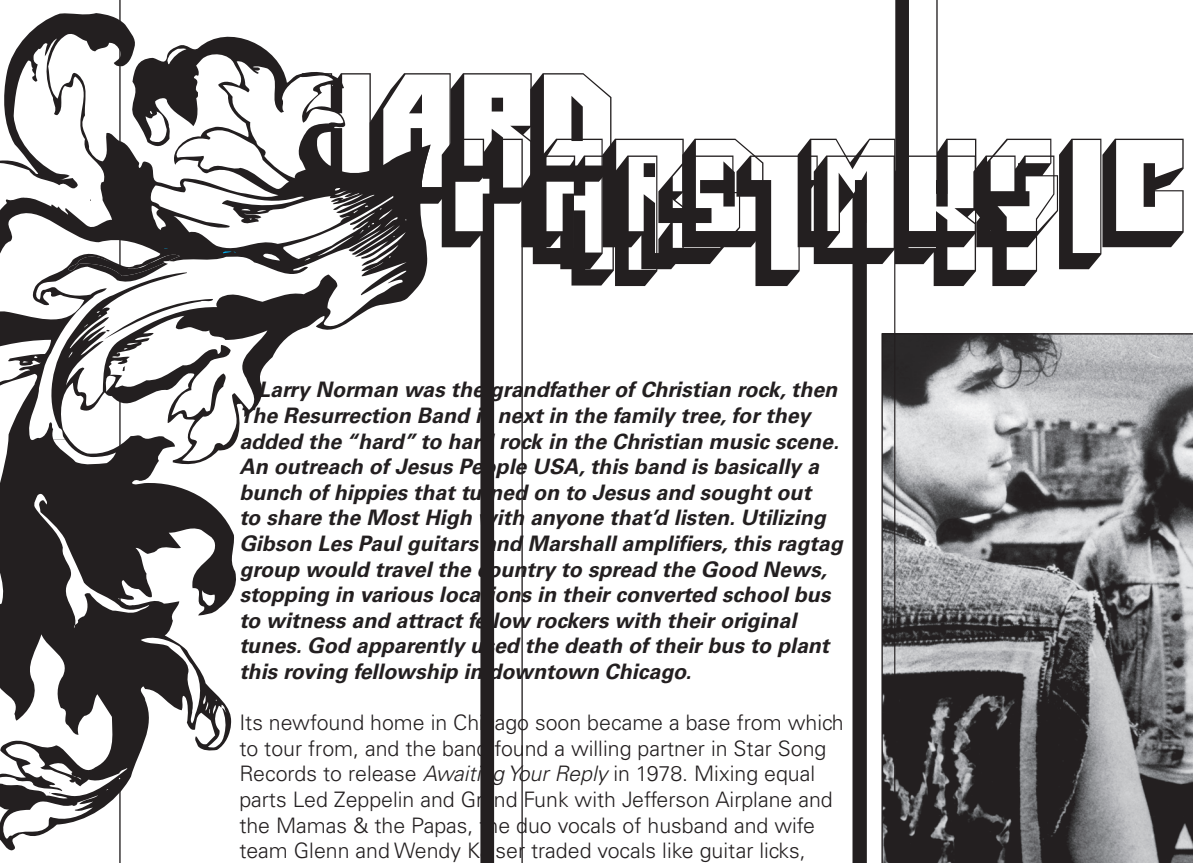

Larry Norman was the grandfather of Christian rock, then The Resurrection Band is next in the family tree, for they added the "hard" to hard rock in the Christian music scene. An outreach of Jesus People USA, this band is basically a bunch of hippies that turned on to Jesus and sought out to share the Most High with anyone that'd listen. Utilizing Gibson Les Paul guitars and Marshall amplifiers, this ragtag group would travel the country to spread the Good News, stopping in various locations in their converted school bus to witness and attract fellow rockers with their original tunes. God apparently used the death of their bus to plant this roving fellowship in downtown Chicago.

The RESURRECTION BAND

BY DOUG VAN PELT

Its newfound home in Chicago soon became a base from which to tour from, and the band found a willing partner in Star Song Records to release *Awaiting Your Reply* in 1978. Mixing equal parts Led Zeppelin and Grand Funk with Jefferson Airplane and the Mamas & the Papas, the duo vocals of husband and wife team Glenn and Wendy Kaiser traded vocals like guitar licks, giving them a blues-based hard rock sound that struck a chord in young people's hearts (the ones that would venture inside a Christian bookstore or stumble on the occasional outdoor concert) and struck fear in the hearts of many a parent and pastor. The critic that chose to investigate this long-haired troupe would most always come away a supporter, as these believers used their amplification to attract a crowd and then deliver a strong and heartfelt sermon that was as serious and filled with conviction as any of the power chords were loud and distorted. Seeing a Resurrection Band show usually meant seeing an altar call that filled the aisles with changed lives. While both Wendy and Glenn shared anecdotes throughout the show, it was Glenn's charge to commitment at the end that almost discouraged anyone from coming forward unless the person absolutely made sure his or her decision was for real and permanent. "Easy-believism" had a hard time surviving around these thinkers and self-professed purveyors of "raw truth."

The thing that made the Resurrection Band great, though, wasn't that it was a ministry of blessed young people with great hearts and a wonderful ministry. No, this 6-member band delivered the goods musically. "Lightshine" and "Waves" stand out from their debut, as do the politically charged "Afrikaans" and the powerful ballads "Paint A Picture" and "Everytime It Rains" from their 1979 release *Rainbow's End*. The *Colours* album in 1980 found the band shedding some of its 70s rock style for a tighter and more melodic sound. *Mommy Doesn't Love Daddy Anymore* ('81) carried this tradition right up to the more metallic *DMZ* ('82) album, with its Eddie Van Halen influenced "White Noise" guitar burn, introduced at high speed by Stu Heiss. This was followed up with *Live Bootleg*, featuring mostly *DMZ* material and capturing the altar call sermon at the end. This second helping of heavier material perhaps braced its audience for the shocking *Hostage* album, which experimented with keyboards and a New Wave sound (see "Armageddon Appetite") but also delivered the band's biggest hit to date – "Crimes," which found its way onto MTV. The next year found the band returning to its hard rock signature sound with *Between Heaven And Hell*, which produced possibly its best song ever, the haunting "Shadows" about drug-induced death. This fan favorite album also produced the boogie rock hit "Love Comes Down" and a follow-up commentary on apartheid with "Zuid Afrikan." *Silence Screams* came down hard on abortion and the band did one of its first cover tunes, the Blind Faith classic "Presence of the Lord." 1989 saw the band still touring and benefiting from the success of the Cornerstone Festival that was put on by its own community (JPUSA). The next

album, *Innocent Blood* saw the second big cover tune single, "Bargain," hit #1 on the Christian rock radio charts.

The band also tipped its hat to the rich and deep blues heritage it pulled from with the stomping tune, "Great God In Heaven." Around this time lead vocalist Glenn Kaiser was performing blues jams with friends Darrell Mansfield (another early Jesus rock pioneer that's one of California's best-kept secrets) and Larry Howard (ex-Grinderswitch celebrity who found Jesus). He ended up releasing a few blues albums on the side. Glenn's wife Wendy took center stage with the band's next album, *Civil Rights*, with perhaps her finest studio moment with a cover of "Somebody to Love." *Twenty Years* ('92) was yet another live album that chronicled their history up to that point (23 songs worth). *Reach Of Love* ('93) showcased a depth of lyric writing that was a consistent characteristic throughout their entire career (see "Land of Stolen Breath"). *Lament* ('95) was a departure and formidable undertaking for the band – a concept album produced by Ty Tabor of King's X. *Ampendectomy* ('97) turned out to be the band's swan song – an unplugged album cleverly packaged showing Glenn waking up from surgery to see his Marshall half-stack in a jar on the table.

Along with Petra, The Resurrection Band (aka Rez and Rez Band) perfected the fragile art of music ministry for its generation (and a few after it) to follow. While other models involving art and the expression of faith have grown in prominence to almost make us forget the phrase "music ministry," we have these faithful followers of Christ to thank for setting the standard and keeping the bar high for years and years. Every time you feel edified beyond entertainment at a show, you might remember to thank the Lord for Resurrection Band and what He did through them.

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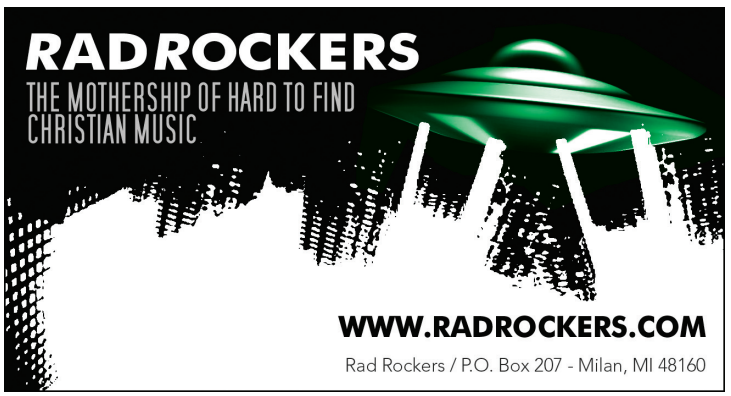
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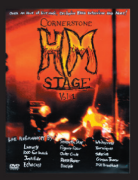

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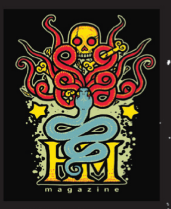

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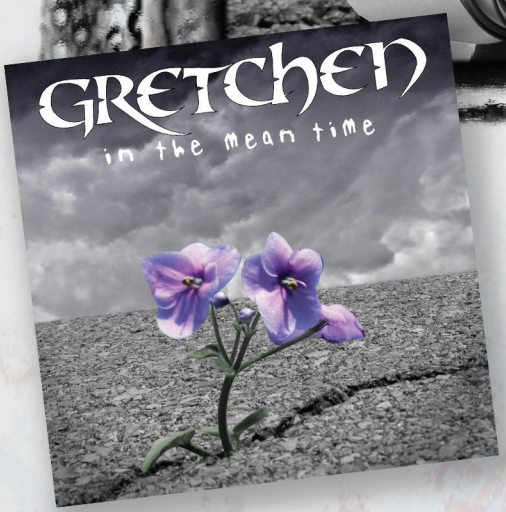

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